

The Fourth Consumer Law Roundtable

“Consumer Law and Policy in the Asia-Pacific: Product Safety, Consumer Credit, Unfair Contracts, and Consumer Access to Justice”

Timing of event: Friday 4 December 2009, 10am – 6pm

Location of event: University of Sydney, new Law School Building “Harland Seminar Room”

Consumer law reform has been notable in Japan since its ‘lost decade’ of economic stagnation over the 1990s, but also in Korea and other parts of the Asia-Pacific. Product safety has been a particular concern, highlighted by various safety failures in goods from China. But consumer overindebtedness has become a growing problem, and fed into booms and then busts in American and European property and financial services markets, now devastating the global economy. There is also broader awareness now of proliferating unfairness in the marketing techniques and terms included in other types of consumer contracts. Reforms to the substantive law also demand attention to consumer access to dispute resolution procedures and government agencies.

In April 2009 Japan created a new Consumer Affairs Agency to look at such problems more holistically and effectively, for example, while in February the Australian Treasury proposed a new “Australian Consumer Law” regime to harmonise legislation and regulatory capacity within this country. These issues must also be considered in the context of burgeoning FTAs, particularly within the Asia-Pacific. For example, Australia already coordinates food safety standards with regulators in New Zealand, and this could be extended to other consumer goods and/or Australia’s other FTA partners – including potentially Japan and Korea.¹

A grant from the ARC’s Asia Pacific Futures Research Network² helps to make these questions a major focus in the fourth Consumer Law Roundtable, which each year brings together consumer law experts from academia, government and NGOs in Australia.³ So far, the invited speaker has come from the US or Europe, but this year – with Sydney Law School hosting the event in its new building on main campus – we invite two leading consumer law experts from Japan and NZ. Hitotsubashi University Professor Tsuneo Matsumoto has been pivotal to Japan’s major consumer law reforms over the last decade, and VUW’s Kate Tokeley is a leading commentator in NZ.

This year’s Roundtable is coordinated by the Australian Network for Japanese Law (ANJeL), with over 300 members spread around Australia, Japan and the rest of the world. It is also supported by the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law at the University of Sydney (CAPLUS⁴), providing the catering.

This Roundtable is an invitation-only event, for consumer law academics, regulatory and peak NGOs, particularly based in Australia. But PhD students and other early-career researchers interested in attending are particularly welcome to contact L.Nottage@usyd.edu.au. Existing Consumer Law Roundtable members and other invitees should contact Dr Luke Nottage at that email address (with CC to c.bromley@usyd.edu.au) by 15 October to confirm attendance (for catering purposes), including an Abstract if wishing to make a brief presentation (no more than 30 minutes, preferably appending more detailed written material).

¹ See <http://eastasiaforum.org/author/lukenottage/>

² www.sueztosuva.org.au

³ See eg Submission at <http://www.treasury.gov.au/contentitem.asp?ContentID=1501&NavID=035>

⁴ www.law.usyd.edu.au/caplus