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## Choice of repairer campaign –

### AAAA industry initiative

**On behalf of Australia's independent aftermarket, the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA) is launching a campaign to promote consumer choice and fair competition in the automotive parts, accessories, repair and service industry.**

Vehicles are becoming increasingly complex, due to the growing use of hi-tech materials and electronics to control more systems, including drivetrain, safety equipment, and comfort and convenience functions. The challenge for independent aftermarket workshops is to keep up to date with the information, technology and tools required to repair modern vehicles.

In the meantime, Australia's car company dealer service centres have automatic access to data and equipment. There is no clear requirement for vehicle manufacturers and importers operating in Australia to make technical repair and diagnostic information available to independent aftermarket repairers.

AAAA Executive Director Stuart Charity said that most independent aftermarket businesses find that technical information is difficult to access. "In Australia, we have no regulated process to ensure this vital information is disseminated. This means independent parts and accessories suppliers, service, mechanical and collision repair workshops in Australia must rely on the goodwill of vehicle manufacturers to get the information or equipment," he said.

"At present, some vehicle manufacturers make it easy for independent aftermarket businesses to access vital technical manuals, update bulletins, software patches and equipment. Many do not make it easy. So the technology 'playing field' is not level and in the future customers will have less choice about who can do their repairs and what parts are used. This issue is especially relevant in regional centres and when vehicles age past their statutory warranty period.

"The aim of the Choice of Repairer campaign is to protect choice and competition in vehicle repair, servicing and replacement parts sectors by eliminating any technical or legal barriers that impact on the Australian consumers' rights to have their vehicle serviced, maintained and repaired in a timely manner, at competitive prices in the workshop of their choice," said Stuart Charity.

### **International experience**

In 2002, the European Commission introduced the Automotive Block Exemption Regulation covering distribution and servicing agreements for motor vehicles. This regulation preserves the motorists' rights to have their vehicle serviced or repaired at the workshop of their choice and at prices determined by open competition. The European Union aftermarket association is currently lobbying the European Commission to strengthen this protection.

In North America, the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association is campaigning to win Congressional support for a "motor vehicle owners' right to repair act" to prevent manufacturers from unfairly restricting access to the information and tools required to diagnose, repair, re-program or install automotive replacement parts. The act would not affect dealers' rights to service and does not force breaches of intellectual property.

### **Vehicle safety**

Australia's independent aftermarket presently has no promise of such open access to the vital information required to continue providing customers with safe, environmentally sound, cost effective repair services for today's vehicles. "The AAAA Choice of Repairer initiative will ensure that the independent aftermarket can continue to supply the parts and accessories, follow all procedures and use all systems required to return vehicles to customers in a safe, environmentally correct condition," said Stuart Charity.

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“The campaign will also address the growing practice by dealers of signing customers to so-called ‘extended’ warranties, which have restrictive provisions on the choice of repairer and parts used, and tie customers to long term service schedules with the dealer. Our contention is that many of these contracts provide little benefit additional to the consumer’s basic statutory rights.

“The mission of the Australian automotive industry is not just to provide customers with new vehicles. It is estimated that over a 10 year period, a vehicle will require service and repairs estimated to equal one and a half times the original purchase price. Each year, Australia’s 15 million vehicle owners spend about \$8 billion on parts and services. Ensuring that owners can access a competitive price for their vehicle parts and services can make the difference between affordable and unaffordable motoring.

“Australia now has 52 vehicle brands offering 320 models in its market. That generates a lot of information and equipment to be kept up to date by the nation’s independent aftermarket repairers and the replacement parts sector. And if it is difficult for the aftermarket now, it will be even more difficult in future as the high technology content of every vehicle increases to promote safety, fuel economy, performance and comfort. The aftermarket has a huge responsibility in maintaining the national vehicle fleet.

“This AAAA Choice of Repairer initiative will fight for fair competition in the accessories and replacement parts sector, and for the independent repairers’ right to gain access to the technical and diagnostic information and the equipment required, to correctly service all vehicles sold in Australia.

“We are now seeking support from industry and consumer groups with an interest in achieving a fair and competitive regulatory environment that recognises vehicle owners’ right to their choice of repairer. Following this process, we will launch a major awareness campaign to ensure that these issues are brought to the attention of the industry, its regulators and consumers,” said Stuart Charity.

Stuart Charity encouraged interested industry members to visit [www.choiceofrepairer.com.au](http://www.choiceofrepairer.com.au) to learn about the initiative, to register for campaign updates, and to download educational material for customers.

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**Photo caption StuartCharityAAAA.jpg –**

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