

Several suppliers to Coles and Woolworths have raised concerns of bullying by the supermarket giants.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) chairman Rod Sims made the call earlier this year to suppliers of Australia's two dominant supermarket chains Coles, which is owned by Wesfarmers, and Woolworths to come forward with any evidence of bullying behaviour.

The call was in response to claims that suppliers were being squeezed as a result of price wars between the chains on a range of products from milk, fruit, vegetables and bread to toilet paper and washing powder.

Sims said the ACCC is currently assessing the claims to see if any action needs to be taken.

"We've had 40 or 50 people come forward with more or less useful information," he said.

"Some people have complained about things that aren't against the law and other people have complained about things that are worth looking into.

"We're now assessing what we've got and trying to see whether there's things that we should be taking very seriously, but it's still early days."

Sims also announced that the ACCC would be taking a tougher approach to the major supermarket chains making "creeping acquisitions".

"The national chains are increasing their participation in the liquor, grocery and home improvement sectors, particularly through many small acquisitions," Sims said.

"The ACCC is concerned to ensure that further acquisitions do not ultimately lead to retail or indeed wholesale industry structures that may adversely affect the competitiveness of these markets or reduce choice for consumers."

In recent years there has been an informal arrangement where the Wesfarmers and Woolworths would notify the ACCC of any supermarket acquisitions.

Sims said the consumer watchdog was currently in talks with Woolworths and Wesfarmers to expand the arrangement to cover a larger range of acquisitions and sectors and to streamline the process.

The ACCC is currently investigating a number of small retail acquisitions by the supermarket chains which included several hotels and liquor stores in NSW, a number of hardware stores in Ballarat and two supermarkets in Western Australia.