



accan

MAGAZINE

THIS EDITION:

THE NUMBERS GAME

OUR HERO NUMBER WOMAN IS HERE
TO BRING ABOUT FAIR CALLS FOR ALL

INDUSTRY INTERVIEW SIMON COHEN

ACMA TAKES ACTION POLICY INSIGHT

MAKING A COMPLAINT,
NSW FARMERS' ASSOCIATION PLUS MUCH MORE

WINTER
2011

ACCAN.ORG.AU
ACCAN
MAGAZINE
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OUR CEO: TERESA CORBIN



Welcome to the first edition of ACCAN Magazine, a quarterly publication produced by the peak body for communications consumers, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

We've created this magazine to communicate to our 150 member organisations and individuals, regulators, government and industry about key issues affecting telecommunications consumers in Australia.

This first issue, *The Numbers Game*, features Australia's first female superhero Number Woman on the cover, who is the face of our Fair Calls for All campaign which you can read about on page 6. There's also a policy update on the ACMA's *Reconnecting the Customer* report, a feature on a fantastic ACCAN Grants project that looks at internet access in remote communities, and interviews with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Simon Cohen, and the Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes.

We hope you enjoy this first issue. If you have any comments, suggestions or other feedback you'd like to offer, please email me via ceo@accan.org.au

Warm regards
Teresa Corbin

Chief Executive Officer
Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network

ACCAN OUR STORY

ACCAN is the peak body that represents all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. We provide a strong, unified voice to industry and government as we work towards availability, accessibility and affordability of communications services for all Australians. Consumers need ACCAN to promote better consumer protection outcomes ensuring speedy responses to complaints and issues.

We aim to empower consumers so that they are well informed and can make good choices about products and services. As a peak body, ACCAN will activate its broad and diverse membership base to campaign to get a better deal for all communications consumers. Member groups include community legal centres, disability advocates, indigenous organisations, financial counsellors, regional organisations, farmers' federations, parents groups, seniors organisations as well as 30 or so interested individuals.

The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.

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LATEST NEWS

Paywave is the first step to smartphone payment system

In the coming months we will see more 'paywave' technology, a move towards a smartphone 'swipe and pay' system. Paywave is a contactless payment system that allows you to swipe a compatible credit or debit card over a card reader to make a payment. Apple's iPhone5 is rumoured to be released later in 2011 and will include technology to allow you to make a payment by swiping your phone, rather than using a bank-issued card. Many Android phones already have the capability for this feature. It's appropriate in light of these developments that Australia is in the midst of a convergence review that will look at the way technologies are merging, as we will soon have a credit card, game console, eReader, computer and telephone all in the one device.



ACCAN brings experts together to discuss smartphone threats

In early June ACCAN brought together cyber-security experts for a roundtable discussion that examined location-based information and mobile payment safety. The panel discussions included representatives from Microsoft Australia, PayPal, Government, industry and academia. They considered how consumers could 'get smart with their smartphone' by being aware of privacy settings, location-based information data collection, payments and banking and preventing unauthorised applications. The key messages for consumers from the discussions have been summarised in ACCAN's latest tip sheet, available at www.accan.org.au



Set-top box for older & disabled consumers

THUMBS UP OR DOWN



BIG UP

- ☺ The Federal Government set-top box initiative ensuring disabled and older consumers will be ready for the digital television switchover
- ☺ New Telstra real-time data monitoring tools with no excess data charges
- ☺ Adam Brimo, Vodafail.com website creator (who also received a thumbs up at the 2011 CHOICE Awards)

WAY DOWN

- ☹ All mobile service providers who now charge mobile calls in 60-second increments
- ☹ Optus Max Cap advertisements – the ACCC agrees, and fined Optus \$6600 for each misleading ad!





New website uses crowdsourcing to solve complex communication needs

The Newell Network has an ambitious plan to find telecommunications solutions for people with complex communication needs using online crowdsourcing. The website creators are asking that people with complex communication needs (CCN), their carers and friends use the website to share their experiences, ask questions and discuss ways to solve problems like how people with CCN can use a telephone or choose products. The development of the website has been led by Novita Children's Services and funded by the ACCAN Grants Scheme, with further support from ACE and Telstra. Visit www.newell.org.au to share your experience and help create a valuable online tool.



Emergency SMS service now widely available in United Kingdom

In May 2011 the telecommunications regulator, Ofcom, announced that the United Kingdom emergency SMS scheme would become mandatory for all mobile service providers. Over 14,000 users have registered for the scheme, which has been in a trial phase since 2009. Members of the Deaf, hearing-impaired and speech-impaired communities, who have difficulty using speech-based emergency communications services, have praised the service for meeting their needs in stressful situations. The Australian government and telecommunications industry, including ACCAN, is currently exploring the possibility of our own national SMS emergency service. Head to www.emergencysms.org.uk to see the UK emergency SMS success stories.

59,532

Total complaints to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Jan - Mar 2011 (three months)

23,790

Total complaints to the Financial Ombudsman, 2009-2010 (whole year)

18,000

Consumers in January 2011 who joined a class action suit against Vodafone

18,112

Complaints posted by consumers on the vodafail.com website

\$91,372

Amount a Qld mother was mistakenly billed by Telstra

\$1.78

Most expensive per-minute charge to call a 1800 number from a mobile phone.

SIMON COHEN

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY OMBUDSMAN



You've been the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman for a year now. How are you finding the role?

There is certainly never a dull moment – it's been an exciting time in the telecommunications landscape and at the TIO. There is a pace of change that is bringing an extraordinary range of products and services to consumers. With these come new consumer protection challenges and the regulatory setting for telecommunications is under the microscope. We've been an active voice in this debate. We have also been making changes within the TIO – to increase our focus on conciliation, to update our own computer systems and to increase our accessibility.

Telco complaint numbers are at alarming levels, with some 60,000 complaints lodged with the TIO in the first three months of 2011 alone. What are the biggest problems consumers are facing with telco providers?

January to March was a grim quarter for consumers – the TIO had never received so many new complaints. A significant proportion of these complaints were about customer service and faults and the vast majority of them related to mobile phone services. Not only were consumers complaining about poor mobile coverage and call dropouts, but also about the assistance they receive from their phone providers.

In your last issue of TIO Talks, the TIO's quarterly publication, you said that credit management issues were of particular concern to you. Can you tell us what you would like to see change in this regard?

Credit management issues have long been a TIO concern. Many credit management issues do not arise because consumers are careless with their bills; debt will often occur inadvertently or by a poor match between a consumer and their service. Some of the areas we would like to see change include: clearer advertising, better information at the time of purchase about the minimum cost of a service, timely and informative spend management tools and flexibility on behalf of service providers to find solutions with consumers when debt occurs.

What do you think needs to change within the industry in order to see less consumers ending up at your office with a complaint?

Consumers accept, I think, that sometimes things go wrong. What they find hard to stomach is when they cannot solve the problem. Too many complaints that come to us are simple matters that could have been resolved within the telecommunications companies if they had more accessible and effective customer service and dispute resolution processes in place.

Are there any areas in which you are seeing complaint numbers decreasing?

As consumers take up more mobile phones, we will see a decrease in the number of complaints related to landlines due to a reduced market share. This comes with its dangers though; consumers may be losing out on safeguards like the Customer Service Guarantee. It is important to make sure that the systems in place to protect the rights of consumers evolve along with the products and services on offer.

What do you think the telcos are doing well?

The Australian telecommunications industry has a focus on innovation that is, frankly, breathtaking! The choice that consumers now have in products and services, and the new technologies that evolve almost daily, point to a remarkable and forward-looking industry.

Another aspect that came to the fore in recent months was the work of telcos during the natural disasters across the country; sometimes quite extraordinary efforts by telco staff to fix infrastructure and keep it up and running in the most difficult circumstances.

Prior to his commencement as Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Simon Cohen was the Victorian Public Transport Ombudsman from February 2008 to June 2010.

Simon has worked in complaints investigation and resolution or related areas for more than 15 years. His previous appointments include Assistant Ombudsman (Police) and lawyer at the NSW Ombudsman and roles at the Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission.

Your role as Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner gives you a unique insight into the challenges faced by people with disability. What do you think is the biggest challenge faced by people living with disability in Australia today?

I think the biggest challenge is the attitude challenge towards people with disability (PWD). I think that our community generally has a very negative view of people with disability and what people can do, and I think that's the major barrier that PWD face – in employment, in provision of services, in a whole range of areas of activity throughout the community.

What do you think our governments could be doing to improve accessibility for people with a physical disability?

I think government is doing a lot of things; government has just passed the Access to Premises Standards which will make buildings far more accessible for PWD than they have been in the past. The National Broadband Network is going to have a huge benefits for PWD, it's one of the benefits that hasn't been talked about in terms of the benefits of an NBN but it will be and so I'm very pleased that government's acting in that regard.

You've been blind since birth. What technological improvements have you seen in your lifetime that have made a difference to the way you communicate?

There have been huge advances in technology in my lifetime and I couldn't do my job without the technology that I use; things like computers with speech output, with Braille displays, etc. But I think for me, the biggest leap forward in technology has been the iPhone, without a doubt. Apple has built a piece of technology with access out of the box that anyone can buy and, with some assistance perhaps, turn on the accessible features – you've got the access there straight away. And that's a very unusual if not unique facility for access; it's usually been that the (accessibility) equipment is an add-on, or different equipment. The only downside for me with the iPhone is that its speech output rather than Braille, but I can remedy that by syncing my Braille [Note] display with the iPhone and it gives me almost universal access to a huge range of things.



GRAEME INNES

Disability Discrimination Commissioner

And presumably you use it to check and respond to emails, etc?

Yes exactly – that's exactly what I do. I'm in Geneva at the moment and it's [the iPhone with Braille keyboard] is keeping me going - not just checking emails but looking up stuff on the internet, getting weather forecasts... I also have a GPS that I use with it, and finding out what's happening around the place with an app that I've got for that. I follow the cricket, so there's an app for that, I use the ABC app all the time for news and there's even an app that I've just found called VizWiz that allows me, if I'm staying in a hotel room, and I'm not sure what something is, say a particular packet of something, I can take a picture of it and send that with a question to a particular group of people who will tell me what it is. There's a huge amount of really useful apps available, they're just the main ones I use.

If you could change one thing about the way our society treats people with a disability, what would it be?

I'd change people's attitude towards PWD. People's attitudes toward PWD are normally negative and people normally make negative assumptions and those assumptions are normally wrong. That just restricts us in a whole range of ways in our everyday life - from airline staff to people in shops and hotels who just treat PWD pretty badly. As a blind person I know the number of times if I'm with someone else the person serving me talks to the other person rather than me. It's quite amazing how PWD are dealt with by the community and we need to change that. I think the only way we'll change that is by having more PWD successfully out there doing things in the community.

Graeme has been Australia's Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Discrimination Commissioner for over three years and during this time has worked on the development of a National Disability Strategy among many other achievements.

Graeme is a lawyer, mediator and company director, and has been a human rights practitioner for almost 30 years in NSW, WA and nationally. In 1995, Graeme was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his contribution to Australia's disability discrimination legislation.

FEATURE
STORY:

**NUMBER
WOMAN:
FIGHTING
FOR A
FAIR CALL**



Solicitor "Jane" of Women's Legal Services NSW says too much of her time is spent thinking of ways to get her clients to a telephone.

Case in point is "Stephanie" of Sydney's western suburbs, who had been in and out of an abusive de facto relationship for years. It wasn't as simple as just getting up and leaving because Stephanie had her daughter to think about.

When Stephanie finally contacted the outreach service, Jane gave her some phone numbers so she could get help with legal issues and find crisis housing. The only trouble was these 1800 and 13 numbers were too expensive for Stephanie to call from her mobile and she couldn't make the calls from home where her violent partner would overhear.

"She had a mobile, but it couldn't be used. The calls she had to make would cost her a fortune and she had no income," says Jane.

"We had to think up excuses to get her out of the house so she could come here to make the calls from a landline. In the end, she had no choice but to call the 13 number for crisis housing from her mobile, and it used up all her phone credit, making the whole stressful situation even worse."

While this is a severe example, the cost of calling 13/1800 numbers from mobiles is having an impact of hundreds of thousands of Australians. There's a growing number of people who are now mobile-only customers and, for many, the changeover has been driven by affordability considerations.

In a complete reversal of the situation that existed when the 1800 and 13 numbers were created in 1997, mobiles are now the cheaper option and people on low incomes are more likely to only have a mobile phone, usually pre paid.

There is now a general societal expectation, especially among employers, that everyone will be contactable on a mobile.

Telcos not connecting

While freecall number schemes have already been changed in parts of Europe including Italy, Germany the Netherlands and Spain – with the UK working towards it – the Australian telco industry is unwilling to address the issue head on.

The obstacles cited by the industry are not technological ones. Instead, they are about changing their back-office arrangements like complex revenue-sharing agreements and billing software.

This is not a good reason for doing nothing when the purpose of these number schemes was to give businesses, government agencies and other organisations a way they could be reached for free or at a low cost from anywhere.

Today organisations are still paying because they want universal accessibility, but they are not getting it.

In fact, both the caller and the receiver of these calls are being duded. The caller is slugged with a hefty cost for what was supposed to be a free or cheap call, and the organisation receiving the call is not getting the full benefit of a fully accessible phone number.

Telstra, Optus and Vodafone recently came to an agreement with the Federal Government to make calls to Lifeline free from any mobile – but there's a long, long way to go with literally hundreds of thousands of 13/1300 and 1800 numbers in operation.

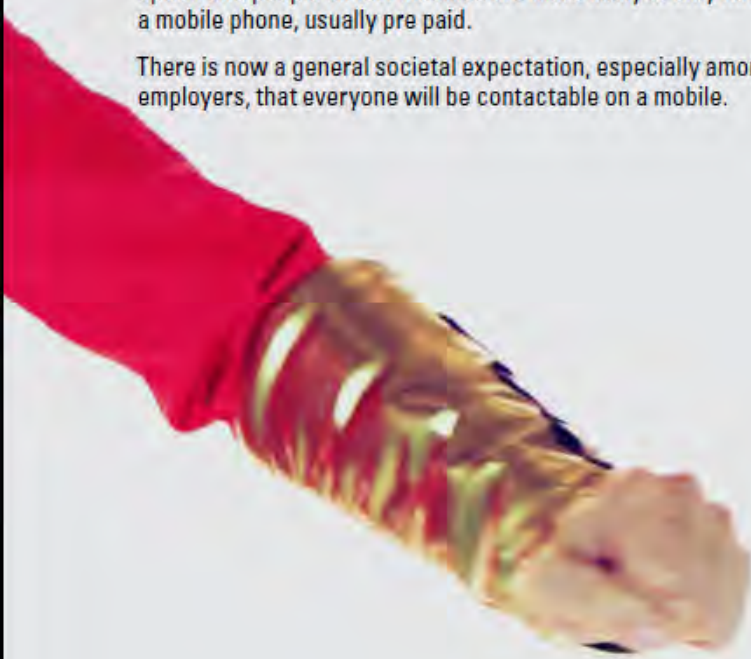
"Telcos can and do make these kinds of changes when they see it as in their interests and we commend them for making Lifeline truly accessible for all Australians," says ACCAN spokesperson Elise Davidson.

"But what we need the industry to do now is work together to address this issue much more broadly. The telco business is not just any business. They are providing an essential utility service and with that comes social responsibilities. There are a growing number of people who are concerned about the impact this issue is having on people. The problem isn't just going to go away – in fact with more and more people moving away from landlines, if anything, it is going to get worse."

Support for Fair Calls For All

In May, ACCAN launched the Fair Calls For All campaign, with Number Woman as the face of it. Number Woman wants Telstra, Optus or Vodafone to be the first mobile network provider to charge 1800, 1300 and 13 mobile calls at the same rates as from landlines.

Since the campaign's launch, stories have flooded in from around Australia, confirming what ACCAN's financial counselling members groups are telling us – that this issue routinely affects people from all walks of life.





"These are exactly the type of calls that will only be made from a mobile, yet people are paying a per-minute rate to do so," says ACCAN's Elise Davidson.

"Other examples we've heard are when there has been a problem with the landline itself, having to call on a mobile to report a fault. This was the case for many people during the Queensland and Victoria floods. Those people had to call their telcos from a mobile and run up huge bills waiting on-hold for ages. We've also heard about shocking bills from consumers spending hours on their mobiles talking to their insurance companies."

ACCAN also surveyed financial counsellors and found that the overwhelming majority regularly saw clients who had difficulty contacting services because of the cost of the call from a mobile.

One financial counsellor said that his clients have the common problem of running out of phone credit while on hold trying to sort out their power bills and other debts. This means proper payment arrangements can't be made and it makes them feel even more helpless.

Another counsellor said his clients face a choice between "staying on the line" or buying food for the family.

Number Woman makes her mark

To get everyone's attention focused on this issue, ACCAN has created a superhero character, Number Woman, who dedicates herself to using 1800, 1300 and 13 numbers to help people in everyday situations. For example, she rescues stranded motorists, helps people call their bank when they've lost their credit card, and brings a locksmith to the door.

Number Woman has written to the CEOs of Telstra, Optus and Vodafone and invited them to become a consumer superhero by committing to a timetable for reforming these number schemes.

To date, forty-nine organisations have endorsed Number Woman's appeal for Fair Calls For All, including the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), CHOICE, and the NSW Farmers' Association.

There are literally thousands of 13/1800 numbers – from Centrelink, Medicare, Kids Helpline, gambling and domestic violence helplines to banks, insurance companies, energy and telecommunications providers – and they're all important to the people that call them.

ACCAN understands that achieving this reform won't be easy, but, as Number Woman says, a real hero's work never is.

Help Number Woman fight for a fair call

Here's how you can help:

- ★ Sign up as a campaign supporter
- ★ Send an email to your telco
- ★ Check out Number Woman on Tumblr
- ★ Follow @numberwoman on Twitter
- ★ Sign up for campaign updates

Head to www.accan.org.au/numberwoman to find out more



HOW TO: MAKE A COMPLAINT

Ali is a middle-aged Melbourne resident who migrated to Australia from Iraq in 2008. When he wanted to open a phone account, he was told he couldn't because he didn't have a credit history in Australia.

So in March 2009 a friend opened an account with Optus on Ali's behalf. He and Ali were told to call in six months time and the account could then be changed into Ali's name.

Six months later Ali contacted Optus repeatedly. Optus assured on numerous occasions that they would send paperwork to transfer the account but nothing ever arrived. Over the next year, Ali contacted Optus five times without any result.

A year later he approached the Footscray Community Legal Centre for help. After the Centre got involved, the paperwork eventually arrived advising that names on the account would be changed within three weeks. It took until December 2010 to actually happen.

The nightmare of dealing with telcos in Australia is familiar to almost everyone. A simple matter like changing an account name or questioning unexplained charges on a bill too often seems to spiral into a nightmare.

Everyone wants their issue resolved with the minimum amount of time and hassle. You do have a right to complain and getting things resolved is easier when you know exactly where you stand. Here are some steps to follow.

Gather all the relevant information

It's helpful to gather any evidence that supports your complaint, such as your bill, records of text messages and calls or details of a fault.

Think about what you want your supplier to do

You may want a credit on your bill, a charge reversed or a change to your plan. You may just want your supplier to fix the problem so it doesn't happen again, or even an apology.

Contact your provider

Your provider should have a complaint handling policy on their website that explains how you can make a complaint, and some may have a dedicated phone number. Make sure to clearly state that you have a complaint. Save any emails and keep a log of the time and date of when you made or received calls.

Still not happy?

Providers should attempt to resolve your complaint the first time you contact them and finalise it within 30 days. If you are unhappy about the response you get from your supplier, or they don't do what they promise, tell your supplier you are dissatisfied and ask them if there is any more they can do.

CONTACT THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY OMBUDSMAN

If your complaint still isn't resolved to your satisfaction, you have a right to contact the TIO, which has the power to investigate customer complaints and make the supplier fix the problem, reimburse you or compensate you. Lodge your complaint with the TIO by doing one of the following:

Complete the online form at
www.tio.org.au

Call 1800 062 058

Fax the TIO's consumer complaint
form to 1800 630 614

Post your complaint to
PO Box 276, Collins Street West,
VIC 8007

Remember, the TIO can help resolve your complaint if you have given your provider a reasonable opportunity to address the problem and you make the complaint within 12 months of becoming aware of the problem. So it's essential you contact your telco first and give them the chance to get it right before going to the TIO.



TIME'S UP FOR THE TELCOS

The Australian Communications and Media Authority's *Reconnecting the Customer* draft report, released in June following a 12-month investigation into customer care, is a damning indictment into the current state of the industry

The ACMA has signalled its intention to take regulatory action where the current Telecommunications Consumer Protection (TCP) Code has failed.

Tracing the lifecycle of a consumer's relationship with their telecommunications service provider, the ACMA has identified major problems at every stage of the relationship: before purchase; at the point of sale; during the course of the contract; when customers make complaints.

The draft report draws on the stories of ordinary Australians stung by bill shock when they have received unexpectedly high bills; confusion regarding complex products and misleading advertising; and customers at their wits' end by poor customer service and complaint-handling procedures.

The ACMA concludes there is a real and urgent need for change and includes six broad proposals to address each of the customer's stages of their relationship with their telco:

1) IMPROVED ADVERTISING PRACTICES

- A ban on specific terms known to be confusing for consumers, such as 'cap', 'free', 'unlimited', 'exclusions' and 'any similar terms'.
- Unit pricing to provide a basis for comparison of plans.
- Telcos to substantiate claims about network coverage and broadband speeds.

2) IMPROVED PRODUCT DISCLOSURE

- Critical information disclosure summary provided to consumers before they enter a contract.

3) PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTERS

- Regular, transparent customer care performance reporting to the ACMA, including number of contacts, repeat contacts, complaints.

4) EXPENDITURE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

- Real time monitoring of spending with notifications at 80% and 100% of usage and a customer's express consent required for spending beyond the customer nominated limit.
- Carriage service providers that do not offer spend management tools will be restricted to recovering 30% of the minimum monthly payment. So if a customer is on a \$49 a month plan and the telco does not allow the customer to nominate a ceiling on their bill, then the most that monthly bill can be is \$63.70.

5) INTERNAL COMPLAINTS-HANDLING

- The adoption of best practice internal complaints-handling that meets the Australian Standard for Complaints-handling.

6) CHANGES TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY OMBUDSMAN (TIO) SCHEME

- Unitary governance model with equal consumer and industry representatives and an independent chair.
- Prohibit carriage service providers that are not TIO members from operating in the telecommunications market.
- Improve systemic issue identification and reporting.

The ACMA has informed industry they have one last chance to improve customer care through the Telecommunication Consumer Protection Code (TCP Code), a code which is currently overseen by industry itself. The ACMA warns this Code will be judged on its ability to "immediately deliver the necessary improvements".

While continuing to work in a co-operative and constructive manner with industry, ACCAN strongly supports the ACMA's stance that more effective intervention than the Code may be required.

Reconnecting the Customer

The ACMA's *Reconnecting the Customer* draft report was released on June 1. The ACMA has provided a six-week consultation period, during which ACCAN, its members and industry, will make submissions about the best way forward for telecommunications regulation

HOME INTERNET FOR REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Project

An ACCAN Grant was used to complete a baseline study of the potential for home internet use in remote Indigenous communities. The ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Swinburne University; the Centre for Appropriate Technology; and the Central Land Council collaborated closely with Traditional Owners and local research assistants to collect detailed communications profiles of the Kwale Kwale, Mungalawurru and Imangara communities in the Northern Territory.



"If the ambitions of the NBN are realised, choosing to live 'on country' doesn't have to mean sacrificing basic living standards or engagement with the outside world. Although the expense of undertaking an assistance program might be high, it's worth considering what it could save in the long run... We weren't testing new satellite speeds or trying out a new e-health application; we were simply attempting to connect households to the existing, standard satellite broadband, using the most commonly available equipment. The process of doing this, however, revealed the obvious ways in which broadband policy is failing to serve remote Indigenous communities – ways that have nothing to do with technology. Unfortunately, these gaps have not been resolved under the current plan for the National Broadband Network."

– Ellie Rennie, ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Swinburne University

The Communities

In NT 25% of the Aboriginal population (10,000 people) live in small remote communities. The average size of Indigenous communities in Australia with populations under 100 is 20 people.

None of the communities had mobile coverage, only one had adequate free-to-air TV, and two had only a shared public phone.

Only 6% of interviewed residents had a computer, and only a third had used the internet.

Low internet use is not just a matter of availability: internet take-up in Indigenous households in central Australia (excluding Alice Springs) is 2.2%, compared to 57% for non-Indigenous households in the same area (2006 Census).

The Findings:

The report recommends a tailored broadband assistance program that goes beyond current policies. Considering the unique household economics of these communities, a home internet model should consider solutions such as a single internet contract that can be shared through a community Wi-Fi network to individual computers.

Aside from access, the main barriers to internet up-take were identified as cost, computer literacy, and English literacy. Community members were interested in using the internet for young people's education, accessing services, staying in touch, enterprise, entertainment, and creating cultural content.

The project's success has led to \$168,000 of funding from the Australian Research Council over the next 3 years, with ACCAN continuing to be a research partner.

About the ACCAN Grants:

ACCAN awards \$250,000 annually to projects that provide consumer education and research that contributes to consumer communications advocacy. Visit www.accan.org.au/grants

NSW FARMERS' ASSOCIATION



ANTHONY GIBSON
TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPRESENTATIVE
NSW FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

Tell us about your organisation

The NSW Farmers' Association is the key state representative body for both intensive and extensive industries ranging from broadacre, meat, wool and grain producers, to producers in the horticulture, dairy, poultry meat, egg, pork, oyster and goat industries. Through its commercial, policy and apolitical lobbying activities it provides a powerful and positive link between farmers, the Government and the general public. Our Membership consists of approximately 10,000 farmers who participate in the democratic formulation of our policy positions.

What is your main goal?

The Association's telecommunications policy has been developed over many years, continually evolving with changes in technology, social policy and regulatory framework. Regardless of change, there have always been two underlying principles: parity of service and parity of price. We believe these principles should apply to all telecommunications customers – no matter where they live. This philosophy drives the Association's objectives in the area of telecommunications.

What are the communications challenges/issues your members face?

The Association believes that telecommunications services in rural areas have long been inadequate, with broadband internet and mobile services of greatest concern.

The Association's key focuses are improved mobile telephony, the maintenance of a reliable fixed telephone service, improved broadband internet, strong regulatory mechanisms and the availability of funding for regional telecommunications projects. The roll-out of the NBN and the lack of mobile service in rural NSW are key focuses currently.

Why are you a member of ACCAN?

The Association was keen to be part of a telecommunications organisation focused on consumer representation. In ACCAN, we saw an opportunity to not only obtain important information on key issues and campaigns, but to provide input from our rural perspective. Since joining we have attended the first annual conference, participated in the 'Fair Calls for All' campaign and obtained valuable policy advice from staff.

The coming years will offer significant challenges and opportunities in rural and regional telecommunications. The Association looks forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship with ACCAN during this time.

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

The Centre for eCommerce and Communications (CeCC) at the University of Ballarat, though applied research, community engagement and other activities, promotes innovation through the application of new technologies. Their work focuses on areas such as web-based geographic information systems (GIS), knowledge management, single source publishing and portal development.



OUR BROADBAND FUTURE



7 – 8 September 2011

2011 ACCAN National Conference

Aerial UTS Function Centre, Sydney

Full program available at accan.org.au/conference

Register before 29 July for earlybird discount

accan

Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network