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# About ACCAN

**Who we are**

ACCAN is the peak body representing consumers on 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.

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.

Our 175 or so members are a diverse bunch. Our 100 organisational members include community legal centres, disability advocates, farmers’ federations, financial counsellors, parents groups, regional groups, seniors’ organisations and research bodies. We are also grateful to have 75 individual members who support the work that we do.

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

**Our mission**

Communications are increasingly essential to participation in society, and we believe that communications consumers are entitled to rights drawn from the principles of consumer and human rights. In short, we exist to:

* Campaign for consumers and the public interest.
* Place emphasis on the needs of consumers for whom the market is not working.
* Inspire, inform, enable and equip consumers to act in their own interests.
* Research consumer issues to produce sound information and evidence.
* Build partnerships and work across jurisdictions to optimise positive outcomes.

**Our values**

As an organisation we will:

* Act with courage, integrity and honesty.
* Operate efficiently, effectively and ethically.
* Value diversity and demonstrate best practice in inclusion and accessibility in our work.
* Value volunteers, staff and members for their crucial role in our work.
* Recognise that building constructive relationships with members, our community, industry, regulators, and government is critical to achieving our mission.

# Chair Report

Communications is a key element in the fabric of Australian society. It is essential that the communications markets are competitive and robust so as to provide high quality and reliable services. It’s equally important that communications consumers are treated fairly and receive clear information so as to be able to make informed decisions about products and services.

ACCAN, established in 2009, is the peak consumer body for this sector. It’s our job to represent the interests of all Australian consumers on these issues. Our scope covers telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. Our 175 members represent a diverse range of interests, including farmers, youth, seniors, Aboriginal communities, people on low incomes, people with disabilities, students, financial counsellors and legal aid centres among many others.

ACCAN is an independent advocate for our members and the interests of all communications consumers. We currently receive $2 million funding per annum from the Australian Government under Section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (the Act). This funding is recouped from telecommunications carriers as part of their obligation under the *Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997*.

We are fortunate to have a strong Board comprised of a group of highly qualified Directors with different backgrounds who volunteer their expertise. During the year Heron Loban, Len Bytheway, Nan Bosler, Su Robertson, Sue Salthouse and Kyle Miers stepped down from the Board. I’d like to sincerely thank our former directors for their contribution to the organisation.

Alex Varley, Kat Lane, George Perry and Johanna Plante were welcomed as new Directors in addition to Sue Salthouse and Kyle Miers, who were re-elected. I’d also like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution of Sue Salthouse as our previous chair and thank all of our Directors for their dedication, expertise and collegiate goodwill in our work for ACCAN over the past twelve months.

We extend our thanks and best wishes to Allan Asher, ACCAN’s founding CEO who resigned during the year to take up the role of Commonwealth Ombudsman. ACCAN was fortunate to have Alan for a resoundingly strong start. One of the most important decisions the Board has taken this year is the appointment of our Chief Executive Officer, Teresa Corbin. Prior to her appointment, Teresa had been deputy chief executive of ACCAN, and her great experience in the industry and outstanding management ensured a smooth transition for the organisation.

ACCAN’s mission is to advocate for available, affordable and accessible communications for all Australians. In the context of broadband policy, which has been front and centre of political and public debate this year, we will continue to strongly advocate for all Australians to have access to reliable, high-speed broadband at an affordable price.

It’s a time of intensive change for the telecommunications industry. While the pages that follow celebrate some of the many successes won by consumer advocates over the past year, there remains much work to be done. On behalf of all the Board I thank each of the loyal, hardworking and innovative ACCAN team for their work over the past year and offer them our encouragement for ACCANs important work in the year ahead.

Professor Michael Fraser AM

Chair, ACCAN Board

# CEO Report

In October 2010 I was honoured to be appointed Chief Executive Officer of ACCAN, an organisation I helped establish. Working with our founding chief executive, Allan Asher in the first year for ACCAN was an excellent opportunity and the organisation benefited greatly under his leadership. I want to personally thank Allan for his dedication to putting fairness and equity back on the communications policy agenda in Australia.

As ACCAN’s new CEO, I am honoured to take up the baton on to ensure consumer concerns continue to be at the top of the industry’s priority list. My personal commitment has always been in advocating for consumers and ACCAN’s goal remains to ensure those interests are at the heart of policy making in this sector. Having seen the rapid evolution of new communications products and services, it is both a great responsibility and challenge to lead the peak consumer body in 2011 – a moment in time I have referred to as a perfect storm – where government reforms, regulatory action and industry change have all come at once.

I am very grateful that ACCAN’s work is supported by an ever growing number of member organisations and individuals. Many are advocates themselves and many represent the people in Australia who are the most disadvantaged when it comes to accessing telecommunications services. We are fortunate to have such an engaged membership base and I want to thank each of them for their ongoing endorsement of our submissions and participation in our campaigns.

We are pleased to have a seat at the table in some government, industry and regulatory forums and – while we may sometimes disagree on the best path to get there – we genuinely believe that the individuals we work with share a willingness to negotiate and compromise. We look forward to continuing to build on these relationships in the coming year.

I’d like to thank our volunteer Board of Directors, led by Professor Michael Fraser, for their stewardship over the past year and their support of me in my role as CEO.

Finally, I’d like to acknowledge our staff team who consistently go above and beyond the call of duty. Most especially I want to thank our senior management group of Elissa Freeman, Yuriko Hoshi and Ryan Sengara. It’s with sadness that we farewell Ryan this year and thank him for his effort in establishing a best-practice grants scheme and building an exemplary portfolio of consumer-driven research. The entire ACCAN team gives me the inspiration and drive to continue to strive for better outcomes – they are, one and all, dedicated and talented individuals that I am proud to lead.

Teresa Corbin  
Chief Executive Officer  
ACCAN

# Highlights

* ACCAN’s submissions and member endorsements influenced all six recommendations made in the ACMA *Reconnecting the Customer* Draft Report.
* We held Vodafone to account for network issues that led to major customer service and complaint handling problems, and used mainstream and social media to inform customers of their right to make complaints to the TIO.
* Our grant report, *Communications Privacy Complaints: In Search of the Right Path,* was mentioned in a Senate Inquiry into the Privacy of Australians Online.
* Key recommendations in ACCAN’s submission on Telstra structural separation instruments exposure drafts were adopted by the Government in the final instruments.
* ACCAN’s Fair Calls submission on the cost of calling 1800, 1300 and 13 calls from mobiles attracted endorsements from 27 individuals and organisations.
* Our lobbying played a part in the increase in TV caption quotas to 18 hours per day on all free-to-air networks and the inclusion of quality standards for captions in the Broadcasting Services Act.
* ACCAN received a record 71 applications for the 2011 Round of the Grants Scheme.
* Played a critical communications role when the Queensland flood disaster disrupted the National Relay Service, and ensured that information was available to the Deaf community in Auslan.
* Our Research Linkage Forum, showcasing ACCAN’s grants and research work, was attended by over 70 participants.
* We launched a new ACCAN website, which is easier to navigate, has greater functionality and ensures web content is accessible by conforming to an ‘AA’ rating against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. Our NBN: Guide for Consumers received 8,000 individual hits in one day.

# Policy & Campaigns Report

Throughout the year our dedicated team of advocates has written, spoken, researched and even tweeted about how communications markets and regulations can better serve all Australians.

I feel proud of how much our policy team has been able to achieve. Changes to government policy, industry practice and consumer behaviour generally take a great deal of time and effort to achieve. Yet ACCAN has enjoyed many significant successes in a relatively short space of time.

We’ve put a lot of time and resources into the 17-month long Reconnecting the Customer inquiry conducted by the ACMA. Our submissions, endorsed by more than 30 of ACCAN’s members, have played a role in some of the recommendations we are now seeing from the regulator that aim to address bill shock, the quality of industry’s internal complaints processes and the governance structure of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

Our representations to the Federal Government ensured that new consumer protections relating to the customer service guarantee and universal service obligations, as well as structural separation of Telstra, were enshrined in the *Telecommunications (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Act* passed in November 2010, and its subordinate instruments.

Lastly, we have ensured that policy makers engage with the most egregious shortfalls of communications policy. Through our super-complaint we succeeded in getting the ACMA to prioritise the costs of freecall and local rate numbers in its review of the numbering plan. We have also worked closely with the DBCDE to ensure that the review of the National Relay Service would include a broad remit to reconsider delivery of disability telephony equipment and services.

Elissa Freeman  
Director of Policy & Campaigns

Fair Calls for All Campaign

ACCAN has led a strong campaign lobbying for fair calls to 1800, 1300 and 13 numbers from mobile phones. We, and many other parts of the community, believe that it is unfair that a free or local-rate call from a mobile phone can cost anywhere between 22 cents and $1.78 per minute.

In September 2010 ACCAN, Financial Counselling Australia and the Australian Council of Social Services issued Australia’s first super-complaint outlining the industry-wide problem, particularly for the 14% of Australians who only have access to a mobile phone.

In May 2011 we launched our public campaign, Fair Calls for All, led by Number Woman. She’s the super hero with the power of connection who has been helping us explain why both businesses and consumers will benefit from free-to-call numbers that work from mobile phones. With her help we’ve lobbied industry, regulators and government bodies. Sixty-two organisations have endorsed the campaign, including the National Union of Students, Homelessness Australia and the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC).

Number Woman is continuing to help us fight for Fair Calls for All. Watch this space for exciting actions in 2011.

# Reconnecting the Customer Inquiry

In September 2010 ACCAN lodged its submission to the ACMA’s *Reconnecting the Customer* Inquiry. It was a bold submission that called for mandatory consumer protection regulation to address the pressing consumer issues like bill shock, contract complexity and the timely resolution of complaints. Around 20 consumer organisations either made their own submissions or supported ACCAN’s recommendations.

ACCAN appeared at the first hearing in October. Our evidence highlighted the failures of the current Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code and our doubts that the review process would make headway, especially in improving compliance with a voluntary code.

In June 2011 the ACMA released its draft report which was scathing of the standards of customer service and complaint handling. It acknowledged widespread failures to protect customers. The report proposed six action areas including bill shock, unit pricing, internal and external dispute handling and pre-contract information statements. ACCAN’s submission to the draft report also received widespread endorsement from members.

The ACMA has now put the industry on notice to implement these reforms within five months or have regulations imposed.

The Queensland Flood Disaster

The tragic floods in Queensland in January of this year demonstrated many of the strengths and weaknesses of Australia’s emergency services and warnings systems.

One critical consequence of the flooding experienced in Brisbane was that the National Relay Service (NRS), an essential phone service for the Deaf and hearing impaired communities, was disrupted throughout Australia for a period of almost 24 hours from 12 January 2011. During this period emergency service calls remained available to some, but not all, NRS users.

As a result ACCAN published a report titled *The Queensland flood disaster: Access for People with Disability,* which includes recommendations for a number of agencies to improve access to emergency call services and information for people with disability.

# Committees

ACCAN’s policy team represent consumers on a number of industry, regulatory and government committees. Following are the list of committees our team has contributed to over the past 12 months.

* Australian Communication Exchange - National Relay Service Consumer Consultative Committee
* Australian Communications and Media Authority – Closed Captioning Committee
* Australian Communications and Media Authority – Consumer Consultative Forum
* Australian Communications and Media Authority – Emergency Call Service Advisory Committee
* Australian Communications and Media Authority – Numbering Advisory Committee
* Australian Competition and Consumer Commission – Consumer Consultative Committee
* Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) – Electromagnetic Energy Reference Group
* COAG – Online Communications Council National Broadband Development Group
* Communications Alliance – Accessibility Features Information Code Working Committee
* Communications Alliance – Emergency Call Service Requirements Code Revision Committee
* Communications Alliance – Mobile Premium Services Working Committee
* Communications Alliance – NBN Consumer Education Group
* Communications Alliance – Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code Steering Group
* Communications Alliance – Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code Working Group
* Digital Switchover Taskforce – Consumer Expert Group
* Optus – Consumer Liaison Forum
* Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman – Council

1. Telstra – Disability Forum (observer status only)

ACCAN has two Standing Advisory Committees (SAC) whose members help inform our policy positions and campaign areas. We’d like to thank the following individuals for their time and expertise over the past year.

Standing Advisory Committee on Consumer Affairs

* Nan Bosler (Chairperson (former), ACCAN Board)
* Johanna Plante (Chairperson (current), ACCAN Board)
* Jo Benvenuti (Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre)
* Ian Butterworth (Telecommunications Consumers Group SA)
* David Lawson (Australian Financial Counselling and Credit Reform Association)
* Loretta Kreet (Legal Aid Queensland)
* Paul Harrison (Deakin University)
* Holly Raiche (Internet Society Australia)
* Victoria Rubensohn
* Heather Wieland (Country Women’s Association)

Standing Advisory Committee Disability Issues

* Denise Wood (University South Australia)
* Leah Hobson( Australian Federation of Disability Organisations)
* Lynnden Beaumont (Deafness Forum Australia)
* Nick Rushworth (Brain Injury Australia)
* Scott Hollier (Media Access Australia)
* Zel Iscel (National Ethnic Disability Alliance)
* Sue Salthouse (Chairperson (former), ACCAN Board)
* David Parker (Deaf Australia)
* Kyle Miers (Chairperson (current), ACCAN Board)
* Hank Wyllie

# Consumer Awareness

It’s part of our mission to inspire, inform and enable consumers to act in their own best interests. This year we did this through a number of communication channels: our weekly WebNews email bulletin, tip sheets on our website, via Twitter and the internet, and – of course – through traditional media channels, such as newspapers, radio and television.

This year, the spotlight has been on telco customer service and complaint handling, with the ACMA Reconnecting the Customer inquiry continuing and complaint numbers to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) ever increasing. In late 2010 ACCAN conducted some research around how many of the millions of telco customers who have unresolved complaints actually make their way to the TIO and the answer was startling – only about one in ten.

To this end, we published a tip sheet called ‘How to make a complaint that gets heard’, which offers a straightforward guide for consumers on complaint resolution. It’s been made available in a number of ways: via our website, through WebNews and even via social media. As complaints about Vodafone’s well-publicised network problems grew to a roar towards the end of 2010, we began sharing it with consumers via Twitter and allowed media outlets to link to it on their websites.

There were also a number of high-profile privacy breaches this year and our research and tip sheets made us a popular media commentator regarding what to do if you believe your privacy has been compromised. Global roaming charges was another strong theme, and we’ve contributed to a number of articles and published advice about how to prevent global roaming charges ruining your holiday.

The rollout of the National Broadband Network was another topic that dominated telecommunications discourse. While much of the discussion in mainstream media was about the politics of the NBN, we were listening to the important questions consumers were asking about more practical considerations. To this end, we published an NBN guide that provided some answers.

Finally, we continue to strive to demonstrate best practice in accessibility. Our new website, launched in April 2011, is WCAG 2.0 compliant; we’ve issued a number of media releases in Auslan (Australian sign language) and published some of our tip sheets in Easy English. ACCAN’s reputation as a go-to point for media to get independent opinion on telecommunication issues continues to grow, and, as more people hear about ACCAN, I have no doubt in the coming year we’ll be able to assist even greater numbers of consumers to help themselves.

Elise Davidson  
Media & Communications Manager

# Grants & Research report

This was the first full year for ACCAN’s Grants Scheme and research program, and both have been successful in building a strong evidence base to underpin ACCAN’s advocacy and policy work.

Eight grant projects were completed during the year, representing a diverse mix of research and education initiatives. Scams, privacy complaints, information about accessible products and basic access issues for a range of vulnerable consumer groups were researched by expert groups.

The Grants Scheme is already delivering outcomes. The *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities* projecthas been successful in securing three further years of funding through the Australia Research Council program. The *Communications Privacy Complaints* report was quoted, in full, as the first recommendation in the Senate Committee Report into the online privacy of Australians, and helped us respond to privacy issues during the year. The *Internet Scams: How to Protect Yourself* videos are now posted on the ACCC’s SCAMwatch website.

To ensure the Scheme is meeting or exceeding best practice, we conducted a post-implementation review which concluded that we’re delivering well but can do even better. We made some changes, including an online application form, and received a record 71 applications for the 2011 round.

Through ACCAN’s research program we produced case studies, policy research and analysis, and profile raising activities to support our advocacy and campaigns work.

Ryan Sengara  
Director of Research & Development

**ACCAN Grants Scheme projects completed in 2010-2011**

Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities  
ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Swinburne University, the Centre of Appropriate Technology, and the Central Land Council

The Newell Network  
Novita Children's Services

Another Barrier? Regional consumers, non-profit organisations, and the NBN in the Northern Rivers Region  
Spiral Research & Consulting

Telecommunications and Deafblind Australians  
Able Australia Services

Where Do I Start? Female Seniors and the Internet  
Council on the Ageing WA

[Communicating Difference: Understanding Communications Consumers from Non English Speaking Backgrounds](http://accan.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=195:communicating-difference-understanding-communications-consumers-from-non-english-speaking-backgrounds&catid=133:completed-grants&Itemid=66)  
National Ethnic Disability Alliance

[Internet scams: how to protect yourself](http://accan.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=238:internet-scams-how-to-protect-yourself&catid=133:completed-grants&Itemid=66)   
WA Deaf Society

[Communications Privacy Complaints: In Search of the Right Path](http://accan.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=192:communications-privacy-complaints-in-search-of-the-right-path&catid=133:completed-grants&Itemid=66)  
Cyberspace Law and Policy Centre, University of New South Wales

# Publications

**Research publications**

Rennie, E, Crouch, A, Wright, A & Thomas, J 2011. *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Notara, D, Spiral Research and Consulting 2011. *Another Barrier? Regional consumers, not-for-profit organisations, and the NBN in the Northern Rivers Region*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Able Australia 2011. *Telecommunications and Deafblind Australians,* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Palmer, S., Council on the Ageing (WA) 2010. *Where do I start? Female seniors and the Internet.* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Footscray Community Legal Centre & Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), 2011. *Taking Advantage of Disadvantage: Case Studies of Refugee and New Migrant Experiences in the Communications Market.* ACCAN, Sydney.

Wood, J, 2011. *Fair Go: Complaint Resolution for Digital Australia,* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Sydney.

ACCAN, 2011. Research on caption awareness, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Sydney.

ACCAN, 2010. Research reveals telco complaints are underreported Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Sydney.

Fraser, M and Barnes, S, Communications Law Centre (CLC) 2010. *Consumers First: Smart Regulation for Digital Australia*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Sydney.

WA Deaf Society 2010. *Internet Scams: How to Protect Yourself*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Wadiwel, D and Hayter, C, National Ethnic Disability Alliance 2010. *Understanding Communications Consumers from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB)*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Connolly, C and Vaile, D, Cyberspace Law and Policy Centre 2010. *Communications privacy complaints: in search of the right path*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

# Submissions

* DBCDE, Trans-Tasman Mobile Roaming, 8 July 2010
* *Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts ,*Privacy of Australians Online, 23 July 2010
* Communications Alliance, Mobile Premium Services Code Review, 6 August 2010
* Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support Inquiry, 16 August 2010
* ACMA, Reconnecting the Customer, 14 September 2010
* ACMA, Supplementary submission to Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination, 22 September 2010
* Victorian Department of Justice, Australian Consumer Law Guides, 15 October 2010
* Federal Treasury, Draft Australian Consumer Law regulations, 22 October 2010 (joint submission with Australian Financial Counselling and Credit Reform Association, Consumer Utilities Advocacy , Consumer Action Law Centre, Consumer Credit Legal Centre NSW and Consumer Law Centre ACT)
* Communications Alliance, Accessibility features for telephone equipment, 29 October 2010
* DBCDE, Implementation of Universal Service Policy Discussion Paper - 10 November 2010
* ACMA, Response to the draft Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Amendment Determination - 26 November 2010
* ACMA, Structure of Australia's telephone numbering plan - 10 January 2011
* DBCDA, Submission on Convergence Review Terms of Reference - 28 January 2011
* Telephone Information Services Standards Council (TISSC), Code of Practice Remedies Review, 03 February 2011
* Senate Committee Inquiry, NBN Companies and Access Bills 2010 - 24 February 2011
* House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communication,Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network, 25 February 2011
* ACMA, Customer location information and numbering data, 30 March 2011
* Attorney General's Department, Universal Periodic Review, 4 April 2011
* DBCDE, Modernising the TIO, 5 April 2011
* Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications, The capacity of communication networks and emergency warning systems to deal with emergencies and natural disasters, 15 April 2011
* Communications Alliance, Disability Care and Support - Emergency Call Service Requirements, 20 April 2011
* Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support Inquiry, 28 April 2011
* Joint Committee on NBN, Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Fibre Deployment) Bill, 21 May 2011
* ACMA, Numbering Paper 3 - Allocation and charging of numbers, 26 May 2011
* DBCDE, Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee – Retail Performance Benchmarks) Instrument (No.1) 2011 Exposure Draft ,3 June 2011
* DBCDE, Convergence Review Framing Document, 10 June 2011
* DBCDE, Telecommunications (Acceptance of Undertaking about Structural Separation Matters) Instrument 2011, 15 June 2011

**Position statements:**

* Super Complaint: 1800/13/1300 Call costs from Mobile Phones – lodged 10 September 2010
* NBN fibre opt-out – 15 February 2011

**Ends**