



Indigenous Advisory Forum (IAF) Meeting Report

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Wednesday, 4 August 2016, 11.00am – 3.00pm

PRESENT: Heron Loban, ACCAN Member
Daniel Featherstone, Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA)
Zoe Betar, National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE)
Nickeema Williams, Hitnet
Gerry Pyne, Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media (QRAM)
Jim Remedio, Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media (QRAM)

APOLOGIES: William Santo, Save the Children Australia
Bernard Namok, Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association (TEABBA)
Michael Charlton, PricewaterhouseCoopers
June Reimer, First Peoples Disability Network
Jenny Nixon, Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA)

ACCAN STAFF: Teresa Corbin, CEO
Narelle Clark, Director of Operations & Deputy CEO
Una Lawrence, Director of Policy
Jeremy Riddle, Policy Officer
Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Advisor
Rachel Thomas, Policy Officer
Kelly Lindsay, Small Business and Consumer Engagement Officer

The purpose of the Indigenous Advisory Forum (IAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representative in the Indigenous consumer/community's environment and the people they represent, with a view to incorporating these into ACCAN's work priorities for the 2016-17 year.

The following meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed. This report will also be sent to invited representatives who were unable to attend.

ACCAN Activities and Summary of Outcomes in the past 12 months

ACCAN staff provided a brief outline of several major consumer issues and a summary of ACCAN's outcomes in the past 12 months.

Consumer Protection

TIO complaint numbers are down overall; however there has been a slight increase in complaints with regards to nbn connections, nbn rollout issues and telecommunications outages. While there is no formal breakdown available it is widely known that Indigenous consumers are less likely to complain than other consumer groups. The TIO has produced some specific educational materials for Indigenous consumers.

Deregulation continues to be an area of focus and some positive outcomes should be mentioned such as:

- TCP Code revisions: consumer protections such as penalties for misleading & disruptive conduct have been retained
- Piracy: the Copyright Notifications Code did not proceed beyond draft stage, and proposal for service disconnection for illegal downloading dropped.

Availability

Availability continues to be a top priority for ACCAN with some developments in this area including:

- Regional Telecommunications Review concluded: Consumer Safeguards review and USO Productivity Commission Inquiry are currently underway.
- The Mobile Black Spots Programme Round 1 has started rolling out, Round 2 applications have closed and a further \$60 million committed for Round 3.
- 2nd edition ACCAN Community Kit publication relaunched to assist communities in the MBSP.
- Sky Muster satellite services commenced 29 April. Education data to be quarantined. There are still concerns about fair use policies and T&Cs, and ACCAN is keen to hear any feedback from consumers. The 2nd satellite will launch in October.
- Independent broadband performance monitoring to increase reliability and quality of broadband services. ACCC Monitoring Pilot was conducted last year, and the ACCC is now consulting on broadband speed claims. ACCAN's survey at the beginning of the year confirmed that consumers are not clear on what causes poor broadband performance.
- We will be releasing our interactive ADSL availability map shortly which identifies areas currently receiving poor or no internet.

Affordability

- One key win for ACCAN in this space is that mobile calls to 1800 numbers are now mostly free, with only two MVNOs (mobile virtual network operators) still charging at a mobile rate due to fixed agreements with their wholesaler not making it viable to adopt the change.
- 13 numbers still need more work especially with essential services like Centrelink using 13/1300 numbers.
- ACCAN has published an Affordability Map identifying populations experiencing financial barriers to telecommunications services. .
- ACCAN is working with SACOSS to advocate for a review of the Centrelink Telephone Allowance (CTA).
- The Digital Inclusion Index is to be launched by Telstra soon, and there will be a presentation at the ACCANect Conference in September.

Privacy

- Registration on the Do Not Call Register is now indefinite (consumers no longer need to renew after 3 years).

Participant feedback on headline issues

The National Broadband Network (NBN)

ACCAN has produced a booklet: 'Guide to Sky Muster Services' to assist consumers. There have been a large number of installations with some issues reported concerning contractors missing appointments with long waits for rescheduled appointments.

Attendees advised ACCAN that the feedback so far from their communities is largely positive, however, there are some issues arising in relation to inconsistent pricing. The pricing ranges dramatically between providers, in some cases within the same geographical location.

Other issues highlighted by attendees were;

- Public Interest Premises trials are now being rolled out but there are wild differences in pricing: the recommended price is \$90 per month for 150GB, however some providers have been quoting \$370 per month for the same (Harbour ISP/EasyWeb). See Action 1.
 - The Department of Communications and the Arts determines who is eligible for the public internet dishes and connections. IRCA is advocating for media organisations to be eligible, and CAYLUS is advocating for local stores to be eligible.
- No access to a fixed service (voice or ADSL broadband) for residential premises in some Indigenous communities. Often such services are only available for government and business premises.
 - It is impossible to start a business without access to a landline or broadband
 - Red Cross and similar organisations assist by allowing access to their services
 - Not all residents have access to telecommunications even if they want it
 - Providers are more receptive to requests from businesses than consumers.
- The method of connection to broadband is critical for the success of the service. NBN satellite services may not be the most practical or reliable and may be subject to latency and dropouts.
 - Access to reliable communications is essential in these communities as the lack of information combined with the frustration of intermittent or no service can impact on other aspects of community life.
- QRAM noted that satellite is not appropriate for their business and many others because of the tropical weather (storm interference) and latency. Consumers need a basic level of service; there is a real feeling of disadvantage in these communities. Alternatives to be considered are:
 - Existing dark fibre in remote areas should be used to provide terrestrial backhaul.
 - A cost efficient solution in remote communities like Aurukun is to build fixed wireless towers. ADSL exchanges in remote communities should be upgraded to provide more fixed services.

Suggested actions:

1. ACCAN should put information on public internet pricing in the Sky Muster guide.

2. ACCAN can develop offline digital information for an app to provide Sky Muster information.
 - a. Information could also be delivered through social media, videos, and modules on Hitnet kiosks.
 - b. Radio messaging can also be used to deliver information to communities.

Disability

ACCAN is keen to address issues for Indigenous consumers with disability. Attendees offered valuable suggestions in relation to delivery methods and appropriate cultural methods of communication including;

- Video and Facebook distribution of educational material due to a preference for visual and verbal communication. Facebook is popular and offers the opportunity for short messaging that can be easily shared with family and friends.
- Use hubs, social media; sites that communities trust.
- Older consumers find new technology scary. There would be benefit to a program of cross generational sharing where community youth teach grandparents/elders how to use technology due to the existing relationship of trust and respect.

Other issues noted were:

- Issues around QLD Health touch pad on-line systems for patients. Many consumers agree to this without considering the consequences.
- Health kiosks in some centres have no content, don't work or have expired service agreements. Often the consumers that the kiosks have been set up for lack the skills to use the technology. The participants agreed that there is little benefit in training people how to use them until there is a stable operating service available for the technology.
- The Cape York Digital Network is no longer maintained.

ACMA Prepaid identity checking

Participants agreed that there needed to be a wider spectrum of people able to sign a declaration of identity. Concerns were raised around:

- The ability to provide authorisation in a timely manner given the lack of reliable broadband connections.
- How the authorisation would be uploaded and sent.
- Verification of the eligibility of the signatory – some verification may be available via a register, but this needs to be up to date and readily available to a telecommunications provider to be useful. It might be easier when a prepaid phone is offered in a local store and the identity of community members is known.

It was suggested that one or more people in each community could be registered as identity checkers, they could provide authorisation of an individual's identity over the phone by providing their own login/identifying details that are known to the telco.

Actions:

3. ACCAN to pass group feedback on to the ACMA.

Affordability

Vulnerable demographic groups identified in a mapping exercise currently being conducted by ACCAN were discussed. It was noted that there is a particular vulnerability for Indigenous consumers.

Discussion focused on the Centrelink Telephone Allowance (CTA) and access to payments for telecommunication services for those on the Centrelink Basics Card. The Basics Card is being used to pay for telecommunications services in the Ceduna PIP trial.

Forum participants agreed that the CTA was inadequate and needed to be paid in line with telco billing periods – fortnightly, as 28 day billing cycles are typical. This is because many low-income people live week to week so a quarterly payment is not appropriate.

Actions:

4. ACCAN to circulate Affordability Map; participants to provide feedback if desired.

Cyber Safety

The Forum participants agreed that there was genuine concern around the expansion of mobile networks due to the number of consumers having access to the internet for the first time. Appropriate consumer education will be a valuable tool for these consumers.

Discussion focused on the briefing note from Telstra in relation to Air G/Divas Chat. It was agreed that there were additional issues around affordability and possibly misleading and deceptive terms and conditions. It was agreed that the perception of ‘free use’ does exist in communities because Air G is still able to be used during a ‘grace period’, and that there is a lack of transparency that needs to be better regulated, as with other third party carrier charges. Participants thought it was important to let consumers know of the concerns about the service through a story on NITV or the ABC’s 7.30 Report. ACCAN encouraged participants to keep watch for case studies and provide feedback.

Actions:

5. ACCAN to Circulate AirG brief from Telstra
6. Participants to provide feedback on cyber bullying questions in briefing document
7. ACCAN to talk to Zoe Betar about contacts at NITV

ACCAN Grants Project

Our phones, Our rights: translated and community appropriate telecommunications resources for remote indigenous communities

Gerry Pyne and Jim Remedio from QRAM reported on the success of this project. The method and delivery of the materials were discussed with the following key issues noted:

- A stable high tech platform is essential for communication, guaranteeing a broadcast in each community;
- Materials were provided in a conversational format and broadcast during sporting broadcast, ad break times;
- Messaging is positive and empowering;
- Project materials are available.

Actions:

8. ACCAN to circulate QRAM materials to participants.

Broadband for the Bush Indigenous Focus Day 2016 - Brisbane

Daniel Featherstone from IRCA provided a briefing of the 3 ‘blue sky’ ideas that were the result of the workshops at the Focus Day. Summarised, they were:

- Introduce a Universal Service Obligation with culturally appropriate principles, and a minimum standard of connectivity;
- Recognise that digital inclusion is a human right, and build digital citizenship through unmetered online access to essential services;
- Provide \$60M to support Indigenous digital inclusion in 300 communities for two years, to fund digital inclusion workers to build community capability and empowerment.

ACCAN's future policy directions and outreach opportunities 2016/17

After an open discussion, Forum participants supported ACCAN's focus on headline issues, and highlighted the value of remaining engaged and providing feedback and issues via email as they arise. ACCAN will follow up with invitees who were unable to attend to gather feedback.

Future Research

Information and feedback is required regarding use of payphones. ACCAN asked participants to provide information about the future viability of payphones and if there was an alternative solution that would fill the gap if payphones are removed. Evidence about the number, type and frequency of calls would be valuable. ACCAN will also approach Telstra for data.

Actions:

9. *Participants were asked for feedback on payphones and their use in communities – i.e. who uses them? What numbers are called? What are the alternatives?*

Suggested Outreach for educational material

With the tendency towards verbal rather than written language, the follow suggestions were provided as the most appropriate means of communication for Indigenous consumers:

- Consider an app with audio/videos (off-line content, not using data)
- Facebook - using videos, quick surveys
- Face to face communication from a community trusted source like Hitnet, QRAM
- Radio messaging, as many communities do not have access to the internet
- Television - NITV and ABC
- Ask communities for their suggestions

Next steps

The feedback and suggestions made today will be used to complement ACCAN's policy priorities, operations plan and research activity plan. Once these have been finalised they will be circulated to IAF attendees.

It was also noted that a review of ACCAN's Strategic Plan will be completed over the next 12 months. This includes a contract review conducted by the Department of Communications. ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, thanked the participants for both their time and valuable contributions.