

Quarter 2, FY 21-22

The summary below outlines ACCAN's activities from 1 September – 30 November 2021

During this reporting period ACCAN made 16 well informed submissions to government, regulator and industry consultations, continuing the heavy load of submission work seen in the previous reporting period.

We undertook extensive consultation with our members and other community groups to inform our submission to the ACMA consultation on its Statement of Expectations regarding consumer vulnerability, and ran a consumer survey to inform our submission to the ACCC inquiry on wholesale ADSL service declaration. We also worked closely with ACCAN's newly established Indigenous Steering Committee to respond to the NIAA's Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper, and to represent First Nations consumer perspectives at the NIAA's roundtables on the same topic.

ACCAN's impact has resulted in a number of positive outcomes for communications consumers, including: our recommendations for improved Telstra reporting (Consumer Safeguards Part B: Reliability) being reflected in the Department's consultation on increasing reporting requirements for Telstra's copper network; ACCAN's positions regarding the Regional Telecommunications Review being adopted by the National Farmers' Federation and Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman in their respective submissions to the consultation; the 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan telecommunications chapter adopting a number of ACCAN's recommendations; and the ACMA partially adopting ACCAN's recommendations regarding data collection for financial hardship reporting.

The Research Activity Plan for this year is well underway with the release of our snapshot research on the consumer experience of digital platforms. Our data showed that a significant number of consumers do not know where to go to make a complaint on digital platforms, and hold concerns over the regulation and accountability of platforms. ACCAN is using this data to continue to advocate for greater consumer engagement in this space.

Grants projects are progressing, with a few small changes requested by grantees this quarter to account for lockdowns.

ACCAN published 11 news stories. These included media releases about the Addressing Telecommunications Affordability report, the Regional Telecommunications Review, ACCAN's comments on the DIGI Misinformation Complaints Portal, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Annual Report, and ACCAN's digital platforms research. Additionally, we published consumer education for handling outages while working from home, buying new mobile phones and stopping spam text messages. We also collaborated with Google to deliver a suite of education materials in support of National Scams Awareness Week in November.

ACCAN's total membership is 205. Organisational Membership is now at 111 plus 94 individual members.

ACCAN staff participated in 69 different outreach, consumer engagement events and member events and consultation discussions. Due to the lockdowns across much of Australia, all engagements were conducted remotely. Despite these challenges the ACCAN policy team has continued to work closely with members and consumer groups to ensure our policy work is representative.

ACCAN represented consumers at 18 committee meetings throughout the period, engaged with government and regulatory bodies on 55 different occasions and industry bodies on 47 occasions. ACCAN met with industry through the formal quarterly meeting framework as well as supplementary meetings as required. ACCAN representation on formal committees continues to be extensive and during this period we were actively working on 14 of the 32 committees on which we represent consumers.

ACCAN's AGM was held on 16 September, and due to the lockdown in Sydney was again conducted by videoconference. The Deputy Chairperson, Chris Dodds' second term as a director concluded at this meeting and he was ineligible for re-election. Julian Thomas' first term also concluded and he was subsequently re-appointed. One other nomination was received, Victoria Rubensohn AM, and she was also appointed to the Board. A new Life Member, Ms Robin Wilkinson was unanimously endorsed by the members at the meeting.

Subsequent to the AGM, the Board passed separate motions to co-opt two Directors to the Board, in order to maintain an appropriate skills balance and provide continuity during the CEO transition process. Accordingly, Chris Dodds returned to the Board in November, and Dr Scott Winch joined the Board at the start of November.

The Board held a series of meetings with a range of industry leaders on 10 November. A formal Board meeting was held on 11 November where Deirdre O'Donnell was reappointed as ACCAN's Chairperson and Chris Dodds appointed as Deputy Chairperson following his return to the Board.

The CEO transition continued for much of the reporting period with the outgoing CEO, Teresa Corbin, concluding her handover to the Acting CEO, Andrew Williams at the end of October. Due to the Sydney lockdown, a virtual farewell for Teresa was held on 29 October, with approximately 150 guests attending. At the time of writing the recruitment process for the replacement CEO had not commenced. One of ACCAN's Policy Officers, Stephanie Whitelock, finished with ACCAN in mid-November

This quarter, ACCAN generated 135 media hits across national print, online, TV and radio. This is an average of 45 items per month.

During this period, ACCAN responded to 8 media enquiries. These covered a range of topics including the Regional Telecommunications Review, NBN Fixed Wireless upgrades, and Telstra moving 100/40 plans to 100/20.

ACCAN proactively provided comments to the media on a range of other major issues including: the Regional Telecommunications Review, the creation of the DIGI Misinformation Complaints portal, the TIO annual report and the need for telcos to be more sensitive to financial hardship.