Quarter 3, FY19-20

The summary below outlines ACCAN's activities from 1 December 2019 – 28 February 2020.

During this reporting period ACCAN continued to prosecute consumer policy positions across our key policy priority areas: Increased reliability; No Australian Left Offline – affordable telecommunications for all; A fairer telco market; Growing consumer confidence; Better infrastructure; and Improved Accessibility.

ACCAN’s activity included:

* Eleven submissions to government and industry consultations;
* Two appearances before Parliamentary Committees;
* Participation in the Minister’s Bushfire Telecommunications Roundtable;
* Initiation of a disability sector-wide consultation into an Accessible Communications Roadmap for Australia.

It is pleasing to note that we have continued to achieve significant progress in improving consumer outcomes throughout the period. The following examples highlight some of these achievements:

* NBN Co opened Expressions of Interest (EOI) for a consultation on **strategies to connect older Australians** by overcoming barriers to connection, including affordability - ACCAN has been engaging on this with all stakeholders under our policy priority of No Australian Left Offline.
* Telstra’s changes to **selling practices and debt-waiver for indigenous communities** has been a result of the ongoing engagement by ACCAN and other consumer organisations regarding poor selling practices in remote communities.
* The ACMA’s **Mobile Number Porting** – ACCANs recommendation that penalties be imposed in instances of provider non-compliance with the draft Standard has been adopted.
* **Audio Description** – the Government’s December 2019 announcement of one-off funding for the national broadcasters, ABC and SBS to introduce audio description on broadcast television indicates the impact of ACCAN’s and the blindness sectors’ ongoing advocacy for free-to-air television access services.
* **Australian Human Rights Commission Human Rights and Technology project** – many of ACCAN’s recommendations to the initial consultation have been referenced in the preliminary report and incorporated in the AHRCs proposals for the second round of consultation.
* **Department of Communications Consumer Safeguards Part B: Reliability** – ACCANs recommendations were partially adopted in the Government’s report, including the need for well-defined service standards for wholesale broadband services, and an extensive reporting regime.

The 2020 round of ACCAN’s Grants Program was opened for Expressions of Interest on January 28, with a closing date of February 25. Following a period of stakeholder consultation in December 2019, the following Priority Themes for this Grants Round were agreed:

* Telecommunications issues for **particular communities.** E.g. Small Business, remote indigenous, access issues
* **Embedded networks.** E.g. Aged care facilities; apartment blocks; consumer experience.
* **Emerging technology.** E.g. Automated decision making; Artificial Intelligence for people with disability or rural, regional, remote consumers.
* **Fixed line** voice services E.g. Affordability, reliability.
* **Non-price factors** and their effect on purchasing decisions
* Consumer **privacy and security.** Eg. E-safety and parental controls (usage, uptake, consumer behavior)
* **Other topics** which can demonstrate direct alignment with ACCAN's **strategic plan** may also be considered.

All 2019 Round projects are progressing according to schedule, and all 2017/18 projects have now been finalised and acquitted. Details of all outputs are available on the ACCAN website.

From 1 December 2019 - 29 February 2020, ACCAN published four news stories. ACCAN generated 143 media hits across national print, online, TV and radio. This is an average of 48 items per month. ACCAN’s media coverage was marginally more reactive than proactive this quarter at 83.92% of media hits. This can be mainly attributed to a widely syndicated news story on Optus’ ACMA fine for spamming customers. This was syndicated 108 times across ABC radio and online.

This quarter, ACCAN responded to a total of eight media enquiries. These covered a range of topics including fraudulent mobile number porting, Optus’ ACCC fine for misleading consumers, NBN pricing, Telstra reliability issues, telco bushfire resiliency, and the impact of the CDR on telco consumers.

ACCAN proactively provided comments to the media on a range of other major issues including: Consumer Safeguards Review Part B, government funding to fight false information on 5G safety, ACCC NBN Wholesale Service Standards Inquiry, and Accessible Telecoms’ availability in Vodafone stores.

ACCAN’s total membership is 203, comprising 107 organisational and 96 individual members. This reflects a small (0.5%) decrease from the previous report. ACCAN is continually working towards being representative of Australian communications consumers and the organisations that represent their interests.

The ACCAN Summer 2019 Magazine was published in December, featuring articles on cyber security and scam technology, ACCAN’s ongoing policy priorities and a spotlight feature on button batteries. ACCAN also progressed finalisation of its Consumer Education Project in anticipation of a formal launch around April 2020.

ACCAN’s consumer representation throughout the period was extensive and included representation on 7 committee meetings, engagement with government and regulatory bodies on 17 occasions, and 11 engagements with industry bodies. We also engaged with our members and consumer groups on 26 occasions throughout the period.

The ACCAN Board is scheduled to meet next on 5 March 2020.

ACCAN’s Google sponsored internship was filled, with Megan Ward currently finalising a research paper focusing on the tangible economic costs of digital exclusion. ACCAN also successfully launched the second phase of the accessible telecoms website, which now features more than 330 models of mobile phones and tablets, over 60 different landline phones and 45 types of accessories and apps. It also features an improved keyword search option and new filters to narrow down results.