Quarter 3, FY18-19

The summary below outlines ACCAN's activities from 1 December 2018 – 28 February 2019.

ACCAN completed seven (7) submissions in this funded period 1 December 2018 – 28 February 2019. This was a considerable policy workload given the summer holiday period and the limitations on resourcing across the sector during this time due to staff leave and public holidays.

The ACCAN response to the DoCA Consumer Safeguards Review Part B (Reliability) has been very resource intensive, requiring extensive member and industry consultation. Our input to the ACCC's Inquiry into NBN Wholesale Service Standards, and renewal of Telstra's Licence Condition have covered some of the same ground, focusing on the need for robust and effective arrangements to support reliable communications services. Another important focus of ACCAN's policy and consumer representation work has been on affordability, with the finalisation and publication of our *No Australian Left Offline: Affordable broadband for all Australians* consumer policy position. In February, ACCAN also provided final comments on the version of the TCP Code submitted by Communications Alliance to the ACMA for registration. Due to our concerns about a number of significant outstanding issues ACCAN abstained from voting in the CA Working Committee ballot on the Code; however ACCAN has signed the CA Mandatory Certificate of Consultation. In parallel, Communications Alliance has recommenced the review of the Mobile Premium Services Code which stalled in 2017, and ACCAN is participating on that working committee. Under ACCAN's Improved Accessibility policy priority, the focus has been on supporting member organisations in their advocacy for the introduction of audio description on broadcast television. We have also developed a business case for a complementary audio description app as a more cost effective alternative for some users. ACCAN has also been monitoring consumers' feedback on their experience of using the NRS, and conveying user concerns with relevant stakeholders and Government.

In this quarter it has be pleasing to track the impact of ACCAN's policy work, with the CEO of NBN Co acknowledging that there is a need for pricing changes for the lower income end of the home broadband market as identified in our *No Australian Left Offline* policy proposal; the telco industry adopting an important recommendation for credit assessments to be undertaken when a customer purchases a product/service with a total value of $1000 or more; the adoption of two of our recommendations in the Regional Telecommunications Review Report – further infrastructure investment and the creation of an Indigenous digital inclusion strategy; and the culmination of the ACCC's action against Optus in the Federal Court resulting in a $10m fine for misleading customers about third party direct carrier billed services (conduct which was identified in our [Third Party Charges](#) research in 2017 and ACCAN's subsequent work raising this issue with the ACCC).

ACCAN has completed preparations for the 2019 Grants Round, ready for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) which will be opening 4-22 March. This is the first time ACCAN will run a two-step process calling for EOIs then short listing and requesting full applications from a smaller number of applicants.

The changes being implemented in the 2019 Round have prompted the review of relevant policies and procedures, including on Conflicts of Interest, Appeals, Stakeholder consultation and how best to support and strengthen the Grants Program into the future. In accordance with DOCA requirements, ACCAN surveyed six of its stakeholders in December regarding priority topics for the 2019 Round. All stakeholders responded and their views were incorporated, with the resulting Priority Themes being:

Priority Theme 1 - Consumer privacy and security, especially in relation to the Internet of Things (IOT)

Priority Theme 2 - Access to communications in regional, rural, and remote communities, including Indigenous communities

Priority Theme 3 - Emerging technologies, for example, accessibility for people with disabilities using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Other topics which can demonstrate direct alignment with ACCAN's strategic plan may also be considered.

ACCAN's research plan for 2018/19 also continues to be implemented with a project, *Incentives & sales practices*, undertaken with Lonergan Research that is due for publication in March. As reported in the last report, findings highlight pressure on front-line sales staff to meet individual and store targets which can result in some instances of inappropriate selling practices, including convincing customers to purchase products/services they do not fully understand and 'hiding 'extra items in bills. Two other projects are about to be contracted with external agencies: *Live Caption Quality on Free to Air TV* and *Time Forgone* which will be assessing the impact on consumers of poor complaint handling processes.

From 1 December 2018 – 28 February, 2019, ACCAN published two news stories and one edition of the quarterly magazine. In December, we created a consumer guide to [avoiding bill shock during the holiday season](#) which provided useful tips and tricks to minimising data use while travelling and advice on choosing whether they are better suited to a roaming plan or using a local sim. ['Federal Election 2019 - ACCAN's Analysis'](#) provided a running summary of the telecommunications policies announced by the major political parties ahead of the pending 2019 Federal election.

The [ACCAN Summer 2018 Magazine 'Affordability for All'](#) was published in December. It featured articles on ACCAN's *No Australian Left Offline* initiative, what nbn retailer exits mean for consumers, accessible emergency services, connectivity and affordability in remote Far North Queensland, and an interview with Financial Counselling Australia.

ACCAN staff participated in more than 63 different outreach, industry engagement events and member consultation discussions. The ACCAN team has continued to work closely with members and consumer groups to ensure that our policy work is representative and that we have an understanding of the positions taken by industry on issues relevant to consumers.

ACCAN total membership is 213 including 110 Organisational Members and 103 individuals.

ACCAN held a Roundtable on Affordability with key stakeholders representing low-income consumers and NBN Co. in December to help build understanding on both sides of this constituency's needs regarding connectivity. It was well attended and resulted in the finalisation of ACCAN's policy position *"No Australian Left Offline"* which was published in February. ACCAN has also been organising its Annual Advisory Forums. As part of the contract for the Accessible Telecoms Project funded by the NDIA, an Advisory Committee has been formed and ACCAN held their second meeting on 16 February 2019 at UTS Aerial Function Centre.

During this quarter meetings included a discussion with the Minister for Communications and also high level liaison with Telstra, Vodafone and Optus on several areas. ACCAN representation on committees continues to be extensive and during this period we attended 9 formal committee and working group meetings. ACCAN engaged on 27 different occasions with our members and consumers groups and participated in member events. We represented consumer issues to regulators, government bodies and the Ombudsman at 14 meetings   We also represented these issues at 13 different meetings and events with the industry.

There were no Board meetings held during the period, however one is scheduled for 7 March 2019. The ACCAN Disability Action Plan is in the final stages of being reviewed and will be endorsed by the Board in the next quarter.

In this period, ACCAN launched its project funded by the NDIA to deliver a National Disability Telecommunications Information and Referral Service with IDEAS otherwise known as the Accessible Telecoms project. Telstra, Vodafone, Optus and AMTA have put links on their website to this service.

Between 1 December 2018 and 28 February 2019, ACCAN generated 258 media mentions across national print, online, TV and radio. This is an average of 86 items per month. The majority of coverage secured during this quarter was as a result ACCAN's affordable broadband initiative, No Australian Left Offline. This coverage accounted for over 60% of media mentions.

In addition to No Australian Left Offline, other major issues covered in media included nbn number transfers, the TIO's systemic issue paper into selling practices, Accessible Telecoms, Regional Telecommunications Review, Consumer Safeguards Part B, unauthorised mobile number porting, and the Universal Service Obligation.