



## Hot issues

### Bush Coalition members outline NBN concerns

In April, some members of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition had their say on issues relating to the NBN rollout at public hearings in front of the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network.

This blog summarises the issues highlighted by [AgForce Queensland](#), [Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia](#) (BIRRR) and [ACCAN](#) at these hearings. [Transcripts](#) for the hearings and [submissions](#) to the Committee are available online.

The [Coalition's submission](#) to the Committee is available online.

#### **AgForce Queensland**

AgForce Queensland Senior Policy Advisor, Dr Greg Leach, spoke about the potential for innovation to turn agriculture into a \$100 billion industry within the next decade and the need for support for capacity building and enabling digital ability for regional, rural and remote consumers.

Dr Leach outlined how AgForce has recently been working with telecommunications providers to develop a project that would deal with the digital ability gap in rural and regional Queensland. Despite initial support, the providers stated that it was not in their remit to be concerned about usability of telecommunication services to foster innovation.

“[The providers’] recommendation was to come back to the Australian government and other sources to look for funds for trying to work with innovation and to help enable agriculture,” said Dr Leach. “So our recommendation is that NBN does not ignore this gap and tries to also provide some funds along with other partners to help enable digital ability in the bush.”

A program to build digital capacity for rural and regional consumers is also a part of the Coalition’s policy goals.

Dr Leach also spoke about concerns regarding the capacity of the Sky Muster satellites to adequately serve those who have no other options for an internet connection.

“We are quite alarmed that, as the program continues on, there is over-subscription on some of the sectors on the satellite. We are concerned that the people who are put onto Sky Muster are those who really need it, as opposed to shuffling people on because it is the easiest option at this point,” added Dr Leach.

## **BIRRR**

At the hearing in Townsville, BIRRR Co-founder, Kylie Stretton, outlined the group's three main concerns about the NBN.

"The first concern is the government expectations have not been clear enough," said Mrs Stretton. "The mandate has been to roll out fast internet to all Australians, quickly, at minimum cost to taxpayers, which in turn has led to our second two concerns.

"The second concern is the lack of customer service stemming from buck-passing between service providers, government, NBN and installers, which causes lack of accountability and transparency. We have horror stories of people having 12 failed installation dates or being without working internet for four months without a path between NBN service providers and installers.

"The third concern is the limitations of the Sky Muster satellite now and into the future. For example, the average household monthly usage for families connected to NBN is 141 gigabytes per month. The maximum peak available to a Sky Muster user is half of that: 70 gigabytes. A survey conducted by BIRRR, in late 2016, highlighted that 51 per cent of Sky Muster is used for business. Far too many regional users are being forced onto Sky Muster, which, by any measure, falls a long way short of the capabilities promised by NBN."

## **ACCAN**

[ACCAN's submission](#) to the Committee outlined 15 recommendations for the NBN rollout. At the public hearing in Melbourne on 19 April, ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, discussed the switchover, the need for service standards and the long-term future of telecommunication services.

"The last few years have seen a number of improvements to the NBN rollout process. However, we believe that more could be done," said Ms Corbin in her opening statement. "It is important that consumers are thoroughly informed and the impact of switching is discussed with consumers before they are required to do it.

"Switching to NBN affects service functionality. The services that consumers use may no longer work or they may work differently. For example, they will not work in a power outage and so the use of phone handsets or medical alarms may require a change in equipment or additional work in the house," added Ms Corbin.

Ms Corbin highlighted that guaranteed access to a standard telephone service no longer ensures access to all services that consumers require or need.

"There are no standards or connection reliability and repair time frames on broadband services, only on the standard telephone service. This needs to change. Communication services are, after all, an enabler to perform functions, rather than deliver value by themselves. It is important that the network is of sufficient quality and reliability in order to perform these functions."

In relation to the long term future of telecommunication services, Ms Corbin outlined how access to adequate broadband has only been a dream for many consumers.

“While the primary goal at this stage is and must be focused on providing access to the remaining eight million premises, consideration must also be given to the next stage. The policy and networks need to be run and operated so that they deliver long-term benefits for all end users,” she added.