

Facebook group helping rural consumers with internet issues

How often do you use the internet each week? [Statistics](#) from the Australian Bureau of Statistics released in February 2016 showed that the mean number of hours spent per week on the internet for both males and females is 10 hours.

Ten hours per week doesn't seem like much time, but when you think about all of the activities we now do online – accessing education, job opportunities, government services and more – our reliance on the internet becomes very clear.

While some of us may take broadband for granted, there is a growing group of consumers from all over the country who are struggling with poor internet services or even no services at all.

The [Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia](#) (BIRRR) Facebook group was started in October 2014 by two rural consumers from Queensland, Kristy Sparrow and Kylie Stretton, when they both noticed unexplained excessive usage on their mobile broadband services.

What originally began as a discussion of their struggles to deal with educating their children via distance education and the limited services available to run their businesses, has now grown into a group with over 5,900 members who share common issues with getting and staying connected to broadband services.

ACCAN interviewed BIRRR co-founder, Kristy Sparrow, to find out more about the great work the group does and the issues faced by its members.

Rural internet issues

Every day the BIRRR Facebook page is flooded with comments from frustrated consumers who are experiencing issues with their internet services.

“The range of issues is enormous - from vanishing mobile data, mobile towers being out, e-devices automatically sucking data allowances, eligibility for wireless broadband, costs, speeds and general confusion over access to nbn services,” said Mrs Sparrow. “Navigating bush internet really is like finding your way through a jungle.”

The BIRRR volunteer team does its best to answer all of the enquiries, but they are overwhelmed with the amount of members who require assistance.

“There is an urgent need for an independent regional telecommunications team to assist people with their enquiries,” added Mrs Sparrow.

Starting a Facebook group has brought some benefits to many of the members as it is now a place where they can share information and help each other solve issues. Many of the common issues have been addressed on the [group's website](#).

“Through the website we do try to help people educate themselves about their particular service, about alternate services which may work better for them and what they can do to limit unnecessary data usage.”

Mrs Sparrow also often personally follows up on individual cases of connection issues with the many contacts she has made within nbn and other service providers who can often help avoid the convoluted steps to getting connected.

Sky Muster satellite services

BIRRR members are eagerly awaiting the arrival of nbn in their areas which will hopefully deliver better services. Many of these consumers will receive services over nbn's Sky Muster satellite; these will begin to be available from late April 2016. However, there are concerns over the capacity of the satellite amongst the BIRRR group.

"There has been a lot claimed about how much nbn's new Sky Muster satellite will bring to rural and regional Australia," said Mrs Sparrow. "We certainly hope it lives up to these claims, although our experience with the serious over-subscription of the Interim Satellite Service (ISS) network, we hold concerns about the limits of this new satellite.

"With the rapid rate we are consuming data, seeing entire rural towns being pushed over to the satellite, with no wireless available in many cases and the very strict limits imposed by the nbn Fair Use Policy, we are very concerned that the service will be outgrown and rural Australia will suffer."

At the time of writing this article in late February 2016, details of some Sky Muster plans have been released. While the satellite will deliver services to many rural and regional consumers, plans will be expensive and deliver relatively low data downloads when compared to plans offered on other NBN technologies.

As membership has grown into the thousands, the BIRRR admin team has grown to cope with the consumer demand for help. The group has now helped more than 500 people around Australia with their internet problems. The positive work of the team has also gained media attention with stories on ABC radio and Landline helping to create stronger interest in the plight of these consumers who are struggling to get and stay connected to broadband services.

If you're experiencing internet issues and would like to join the group search BIRRR on Facebook or go to birraus.com. You can also find BIRRR on [Twitter](#) where they campaign using the hashtags: #FixBushInternet and #DataDrought.

This week [The Land newspaper](#) is running a campaign to bring awareness to internet issues in regional and rural areas. Share your stories with The Land on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) using the hashtag: #NotGoodEnough.