



Indigenous Advisory Forum (IAF) Meeting Report

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Wednesday, 19 August 2015, 11.00am – 3.00pm

PRESENT: Heron Loban, ACCAN Member
Daniel Featherstone, Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA)
Jenny Nixon, Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA)
Luke Briscoe, National Indigenous Television (NITV)

APOLOGIES: Zoe Betar, Indigenous Excellence Centre
William Santo, Save the Children Australia
Kirstie Parker, National Congress of Australia's First People
Bernard Namok, Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association (TEABBA)
Michael Charlton, Price Waterhouse Coopers

ACCAN STAFF: Teresa Corbin, CEO
Una Lawrence, Director of Policy
Kelly Lindsay, Project Officer – Small Business
Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Officer
Rachel Thomas, Policy Officer

The purpose of the Indigenous Advisory Forum (IAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representative in the Indigenous consumer/community's environment and the people they represent, with a view to incorporating these into ACCAN's work priorities for the 2015-16 year.

The following meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed. IAF participants are welcome to use this document in reporting back to their organisations. This report will also be sent to invited representatives who were unable to attend.

ACCAN future Indigenous focus 2015/16

Background to ACCAN's revised consumer consultation model

Until last year, ACCAN had two standing advisory communities, one for general consumer issues and another for disability issues. While helpful in the early years of the organisation, ACCAN has found greater flexibility is needed to liaise with other groups in the community. In 2014 ACCAN developed a new model of consumer consultation forums, including an Indigenous Forum to be held annually.

The purpose of the Indigenous Advisory Forum is to advise ACCAN on priority issues for Indigenous consumers, and identify strategies that could be pursued to achieve successful outcomes. This may include identifying gaps in research where ACCAN could usefully contribute, and allow ACCAN to adjust its focus to assist with work that is already being undertaken by others.

ACCAN's aim is to hold future Indigenous Advisory Forums alongside other Indigenous events to maximise interest and availability, and work with Forum participants to ascertain the most appropriate timing.

ACCAN update on current projects

ACCAN current projects and areas of work with Indigenous consumers are:

- ACCAN grants project [Connections and Disconnections](#) : ICT access, usage and preferences in very remote Indigenous communities.

ACCAN is funding IRCA to conduct a survey of 300 people in 16 very remote communities on their ICT access and usage. It will be used to develop the data sets and analysis needed to inform and guide policy for delivery of telecommunications and online services in very remote Indigenous communities. The research will also identify gaps in digital skills and provide sufficient data to determine the optimal channels for delivery of online content into these communities.

- ACCAN grants project [Our Phones Our Rights](#) : Translated and community-appropriate telecommunications resources for remote indigenous communities.

GRAM will work with remote community members and design agency Gilimbaa to produce printed and audio resources in five key Indigenous languages. The resources will provide much-needed information on phone costs, how to deal with communications problems, and how to resolve issues with phone charges and billing to remote communities in the local languages and in culturally appropriate forms.

- ACCAN 3 year funding contribution to Swinburne University/Centre for Applied Technology [Home Internet in Remote Indigenous Communities](#) project.

ACCAN's draft policy focus for 2015/16

A major area of focus for ACCAN in 2015/16 will be better communications for non-metro Australians, in particular working with stakeholders for:

- Mobile network expansion
- Reliability of the legacy network for consumers who have not transferred to NBN

- Addressing the gap with the short term satellite (frustrations / intermittent service)
- Preparing for the long term satellite (dismantling / installation charges)

Other more general consumer issues are:

- A smooth transition from legacy broadband to NBN services
- Affordability of communications products and services
- Greater accessibility of websites and online content, particularly government websites
- Future consumer protections such as customer service guarantees, and universal services
- Fair access to online content through measures such as net neutrality and realistic copyright arrangements.

ACCAN Disability Policy Work and Indigenous Consumers

ACCAN is keen to engage more closely with Indigenous consumers in our work on disability and accessible communications, and would like to use the Indigenous Advisory Forum as a means of building networks in the community. Our work on accessible ICT devices and services will lead to enhanced employment opportunities for people with disability. We have been pushing for more comprehensible captions that make sense, and more audio described content to increase accessibility of online video and free to air TV content. The ACCAN website has a disability portal at <http://accan.org.au/consumer-info/disability> that is a useful resource, and we welcome feedback and suggestions for improvement.

NITV and accessibility

There is scope to support NITV/SBS to increase the accessibility of content on NITV, as captions are not currently used.

NBN issues and update

ACCAN's fundamental position on the NBN is that no consumer should be worse off before, during or after the rollout. We continue to advocate for safeguards and protections to facilitate this outcome. The change of policy to a multi-technology mix has had a significant impact on the roll out and created some challenges, but we are working through the known and anticipated migration issues. For remote consumers, there may be some charges involved in the installation of the long term satellite equipment. For example:

- Retailers will apply charges for non-standard installations. However, there will be no kilometre charge, and a standard installation includes the installation of the dish and box for free
- Some costs will be involved in dismantling previously installed satellite dishes, but the Interim Satellite Service dish will be removed without charge.

The Long Term Satellite is due to be launched in October, but services will be not available to consumers until the second half of 2016 as testing is scheduled to take place until then. ACCAN sees the transfer of consumers off the Interim Satellite as a priority, due to the poor quality of current services and looming end of contract for services.

Broadband for the Bush Indigenous Focus Day 2015 - Darwin

ACCAN and IRCA partnered in hosting this successful event in July 2015. The major themes of the Focus Day were from a Bush perspective, and have been captured in a [communiqué](#) available at the Broadband for the Bush website. There were many valuable contributions and outcomes.

Some key concerns and issues raised were presented by Daniel Featherstone from IRCA, including:

- Affordability - there continues to be a false perception that there are fewer problems with prepaid phones than with post-paid plans. Call rate per 30 secs or per minute are much more expensive on prepaid than post-paid.
- Unsolicited marketing - the new wave of technology, including streaming services, has communities concerned that unsolicited salespeople may return.
- Appropriateness of technology and content. There are many concerns in remote communities about managing access to content, with different approaches adopted amongst communities. These include
 - content filtering of Wi-Fi access using a cultural authority model
 - Ali Curung case study of local ownership and management of access and use of technology
 - repatriation of culturally sensitive images – Sydney University
 - Management of change in relation to traditional intergenerational knowledge sharing and facilitating respect, and balancing civil liberty with cultural respect.

Teresa Corbin acknowledged that it is crucial that ACCAN be mindful of the cultural appropriateness of Indigenous consumers when advocating for telecommunications services and access.

Feedback from participants

After an open discussion, Forum participants identified the following as further issues for ACCAN to consider in the year ahead;

- Long Term Satellite Services issues will be significant for remote communities in the year ahead. This will expose Indigenous communities to new plans and products, and there will likely be a number of issues arising as a consequence. ACCAN is in a position to liaise with remote organisations to identify particular issues and needs, and work with industry and government to influence delivery of suitable services.
- A dedicated strategy for Indigenous communications is needed to be developed in consultation with communities, so that government programs and funding can be better directed to meet needs. Current issues are the design of the replacement program for the Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access project, with a tender process for annual funding of \$2.2 million.
- Satellite Wi-Fi public phone hot spots have been successful in remote communities. There is an issue as to how these will be sustainably funded when the current network provider contract with Active8 and the Department of Communications expires.

- Culturally appropriate use of internet connectivity, with the desirability of switching off Wi-Fi access at times when the community decides it is needed to control access to specific content. Content filtering options need to be explored, and there is an opportunity for ACCAN to become involved in exploring what viable technical options are available to achieve this flexibility. More information on this could be found from Swinburne University (Dr Ellie Rennie) and the Central Lands Council work with communities funding their own communications program (e.g. the Ali Curung community).
- Homelessness – there are high levels of homelessness among Aboriginal people in metro areas. This raises particular communications needs such as:
 - Lack of access to telecommunications due to no credit on prepaid phone;
 - Access to power supply to recharge handset
 - Affordable prepaid options – rate of calls per unit is high and recharge is quickly used.
 - Consumer information mapping the location of free Wi-Fi spots
- Connection to Country
 - It is common for Indigenous consumers to have a need to come to the cities, but it is fundamentally important that they retain a connection to Country through reliable and affordable communications services. Access to free Wi-Fi has an important role here.

Future research and project opportunities

An Indigenous communications network: Heron Loban led a discussion about forming an Indigenous communications network of organisations with a shared goal of working for improvements and greater digital participation. A useful model is the Griffith University Indigenous Research Network, which can be accessed on-line [Griffith University Indigenous Research Network](#).

A survey of prepaid phone products sold in remote community retail stores to support anecdotal evidence that there is limited choice, and more affordable options could be either made available or publicised so that there is greater information about affordable choices.

NITV are embarking on a digital inclusion project entitled ‘Awaken’ in later in 2015. This will be a useful opportunity to promote and discuss the communications needs of Indigenous communities. Timing is yet to be scheduled.

Suggested Outreach Opportunities

- ACCAN is aiming to hold future Indigenous Advisory Forums in tandem with other relevant Indigenous events, such as the BB4B Indigenous Focus Day in 2016. ACCAN and IRCA will work on investigating this further.
- Participants agreed to share their email addresses and support the network building goals of the ACCAN Indigenous Advisory Forum by making their networks aware of ACCAN’s role in telecommunications.
- The participants suggested that ACCAN should approach Jo Morrison of the Northern Land Council to join future IAF meetings.

Conclusion

The feedback and suggestions made today will be used to inform ACCAN's policy priorities, policy focus, operations plan and research activity plan. These will be circulated to participants of the Forum when finalised.

It was also noted that a review of ACCAN's Strategic Plan will be completed over the next 12 months. This includes a contract review conducted by the Department of Communications.

ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, thanked the participants of the IAF, for their time and valuable contributions.