



Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Members Advisory Forum

Meeting Report

Wednesday, 27 March 2024, 2:00pm – 3:30pm AEDT
by videoconference

PRESENT:

Bruce Bebbington	ACCAN Member
Rowan Kelly	Consumer Credit Legal Service WA - CCLSWA
Marianne Campbell	Consumer Policy Research Centre - CPRC
Emem Udo	Ethnic Communities Council of WA - ECCWA
Robert Evans	Financial Counsellors Association WA
Sally Brindal	Isolated Children's Parents' Association – ICPA (Aust)
Caitlin Perry	NT Council of Social Service - NTCOSS
Greg Ogle	South Australian Council of Social Service - SACOSS
Marianne St Claire	Simbani Research
David Murtagh	Simbani Research
Mary Kozlovski	Westjustice
Sarah Biordi	WESNET

ACCAN:

Julian Thomas	ACCAN Chair
Gareth Downing	Acting Chief Executive Officer
Kelly Lindsay	Stakeholder Engagement Manager
Sam Kininmonth	Policy Adviser
Audrey Reoch	Acting Policy Manager
Con Gouskos	Policy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Veronica Johnson	Broome Circle
Roberta Grealish	Consumer Credit Legal Service WA - CCLSWA
Unaisi Buli	Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd - ICAN
Penny Carr	Tenants Queensland
Karen Bentley	WESNET

The purpose of ACCAN's Member's Advisory Forum (MAF) is to inform ACCAN members regarding ACCAN's current work and solicit feedback from the perspective of ACCAN's members and the people they represent. This then informs the development of ACCAN's future policy priorities.

MAF 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.

1. Background

ACCAN's consumer consultation is ongoing and multi-format. We hold our formal advisory forums annually and aim to meet regularly with our member organisations. We regularly review the advisory forum format and content to support effective engagement.

Our aim is to provide an opportunity for genuine two-way communication that best allows us to hear from our members and other stakeholders about their communities' communications issues. This allows us to ensure that our work priorities and policies address issues of concern and meet our member's needs.

The objective of the forum was to update stakeholders on key telecommunications developments ACCAN has been pursuing in 2024.

2. Key policy developments in 2024

Members of ACCAN's policy staff discussed five key policy developments in telecommunications in 2024:

- Universal Service Obligation (USO) reform.
- Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code (TCP) review.
- NBN Co's Special Access Undertaking (SAU).
- 3G network shutdown.
- Scams reduction.

Universal Service Obligation (USO) reform

ACCAN Acting CEO Gareth Downing outlined the importance of the USO because it guarantees access to a standard fixed-line telephone service, and also provides a framework for the provision of public payphones by Telstra. Gareth shared ACCAN's experience consulting with stakeholders for the recent Better Delivery of Universal Services Consultation. Gareth shared ACCAN's view that the existing USO is no longer fit-for-purpose. From its consultations ACCAN is proposing the revised USO should:

- Provide voice and data as essential to modern life.
- Simplification of policies instead of USO and USG.
- A capabilities-led approach for consumers' needs.
- A dynamic institutional model.

The group then discussed elements of the USO including provisions for mobile infrastructure and redundancy in telecommunications infrastructure.

Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code (TCP) review

ACCAN Policy Officer Con Gouskos provided a summary of ACCAN's telecommunications consumer protections work. Through the process of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code review, ACCAN has been calling for improvements in the current framework, largely through elevating key consumer protections, such as sales incentives, domestic and family violence, and credit assessments, into direct regulation.

Con also shared ACCAN's work on mandatory security standards for Internet of Things (IoT) devices. ACCAN advocated that IoT device manufacturers understand and limit the pathways through which their devices may be used to facilitate technology facilitated coercive control.

The group further discussed financial hardship protections and payment options.

NBN Co's Special Access Undertaking (SAU)

ACCAN Acting Policy Manager, Audrey Reoch led a discussion around ACCAN's consideration of NBN Co's SAU. Audrey shared ACCAN's potential expanded capacity to engage with the regulation of the NBN. Audrey noted that if ACCAN were to expand into NBN economic regulation it would require substantial consumer engagement.

The group further discussed community engagement in the SAU process. Gareth Downing provided more information on what the SAU consultation future process might look like and emphasised the need for broad community consultation.

3G Network Shutdown

ACCAN Policy Adviser Sam Kininmonth provided a background to the imminent Telstra and Optus 3G network shutdown. Sam explained that the 3G switch off would affect the ability of certain 3G and 4G phones to call emergency services. The government recently announced it had formed an industry working group to address concerns about public information about the switch off.

Discussion concerned the unknown number of devices affected by the switch off and the inability to contact 000. Participants considered possible support for low-income consumers to afford device upgrades to stay connected.

Scams reduction

Sam Kininmonth provided ACCAN's concerns over the continued high number of scams through SMS and phone calls. Sam outlined the incoming SMS ID registry and ACCAN's view that the registry should be mandatory. ACCAN hopes the SMS ID registry will help reduce the harm from SMS scams by allowing people to better recognise illegitimate SMS messages.

The group discussed the difficulty in estimating scam harms. The group also discussed the dearth of information on scams for CALD communities.

3. Participant feedback

During the session, forum attendees contributed information and views regarding:

- Technology facilitated abuse.
- Sarah Biordi from WESNET shared details of their upcoming Tech Safety Summit in October in Melbourne and the 5th International Women's Shelter Conference from 15-18 September 2025 in Sydney.
- Questions about consumer information re 3G – differences between residential and postal addresses.
- Fault rectification delays of several months in remote areas. Political intervention needed to restore both nbn Co. and Telstra services.
- Public phone maintenance and the need for better communication around Telstra workers attending communities.

4. Next steps

ACCAN will continue to actively engage with members and other consumer stakeholders. Our consumer engagement is intended to be ongoing. Quarterly member meetings will complement the advisory forums and we strongly encourage our consumer stakeholders to contact us should you seek support or assistance on existing or emerging communication issues.