



## Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

### Members Advisory Forum (MAF)

### Meeting Report

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**Thursday, 28 April 2016, 11.00am – 3.00pm**

**PRESENT:** Johanna Plante (Chair)  
Joanna Gibson, Isolated Children's Parents' Association  
Nigel Waters, Australian Privacy Foundation  
Laurie Paton, Internet Australia  
Sue McGrath, Council on the Ageing Australia  
Sarah Agar, Consumers' Federation of Australia  
Graham Smith, Financial Counsellors Association of NSW

**ACCAN STAFF:** Teresa Corbin, CEO  
Una Lawrence, Director of Policy  
Xavier O'Halloran, Policy Officer  
Rachel Thomas, Policy Officer  
Jeremy Riddle, Policy Officer  
Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Officer

Note: Apologies were received from Financial Counselling Australia, the Indigenous Consumers Assistance Network, the National Council of Women, Youth Action Network, FECCA, and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. ACCAN and FECCA met separately in April to discuss mutual priorities.

The purpose of the Member's Advisory Forum is to discuss the most important issues from the perspective of ACCAN's members and the people they represent, with a view to incorporating these into ACCAN's work priorities for the 2016-17 year. This meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed.

### NBN/Broadband

Concerns around the mixed consumer experience of fibre to the node (FTTN) were discussed. Services in the Hunter area of NSW are reportedly not reliably faster; there has been lack of consultation on installation by technicians in the field; slower speeds have been experienced in peak times. Internet Australia strongly supports the maximum deployment of fibre technology, and is advocating for more skinny fibre to the distribution point (FTTDp) as a cost effective alternative for

FTTN. An expanded USO to include data services would increase nbn revenue and return on investment.

ACCAN noted significant issues to be taken into account are how quickly improved services could be delivered to the greatest number of consumers, and the affordability of improved services for consumers. Members noted that many factors can affect broadband performance, and were supportive of independent performance monitoring and greater transparency of information, while noting the challenges of communicating this information in a meaningful way for consumers.

Members highlighted concerns over the expense of getting new NBN compatible handsets, as only one is provided per household. This means consumers have the extra cost of additional handsets if required.

COTA reported on the concerns of older Australians about reliable power supplies, battery back-ups and the smooth functioning of medical alarms on NBN services. More information is needed so that consumers in FTTN/FTTP areas understand how this will impact on existing arrangements.

The ICPA reported that people were already connected to nbn Skymaster services, pre-installed with equipment for the education port,

## Australian Consumer Law (ACL) issues

COTA supported the approach proposed by ACCAN towards the ACL Review, including:

- Setting up a retail ombudsman to handle complaints outside the jurisdiction of the TIO and more broadly;
- Broader role for ACCAN in providing unbiased independent comparator tools for telecommunications consumers to overcome some of the issues with commercially funded comparator websites.

Additional issues flagged as priorities by COTA are continued concerns with unsolicited sales, both legitimate and scams. Door to door and phone sales remain problematic in targeting vulnerable older people.

## Privacy issues

Members agreed that ongoing privacy issues such as questions around the future of the Integrated Public Number Database; digital identity of citizens; triple 000 emergency services; and internet of things and personal devices would continue to be of concern in the year ahead.

## Equality of access for people with disability

Captions and online video captioning were acknowledged as priority issues of focus for ACCAN's work.

## Universal Service: Defining a basic data service

Members suggested that ACCAN should approach this focused on use of the service, not on target speed. Possible starting points could be:

- What do Australians need to do with a data service? The definition of basic service should flow from this.
- Are we trying to set a baseline or keep everyone connected to a minimum level of service?

## Interim Solutions for under-served areas

ACCAN is funding the development of an interactive map that identifies under-served areas. The meeting discussed options for the best use of the project. These included:

- Working with communities to empower them to provide incentives for telcos to invest in their area.
- Looking at alternative private network providers, councils and possibly commercial TV stations to support community capacity building. Care should be taken to ensure that any interim solution does not negatively impact nbn rollout or prolong the delay.
- Developing a capacity building community kit for under-served areas.
- Using the map locally with councils, communities etc. toward seeking better solutions for services.
- Identifying 5 key ideas to stimulate engagement and creative responses in communities.

## Broadband performance monitoring

Members' views were sought on ways of most effectively communicating broadband performance information should independent broadband performance monitoring be introduced.

## Consumer use of big data analytics

The Forum discussed the idea of developing interactive software that enables consumers to use their own data to guide their choice of telco product. The complexity of such projects was acknowledged, and the benefits of collaborating with members such as Choice, building on their resources and expertise. An interactive analytics tool is not a substitute for simple, easy to understand products.

## Affordability

Vulnerable demographic groups identified in a mapping exercise currently being conducted by ACCAN were discussed. While the groups identified were considered to be comprehensive, COTA noted the particular vulnerability of an increasing number of older consumers (65+) experiencing financial hardship due to having fixed capital invested in their homes, but low incomes.

Other issues discussed included the Data Breach Notification Bill, and strategies to promote more captioning in mainstream media and online, and the increasing significance of e-Health for older consumers.

## Priorities for 2016/17

Members were supportive of the following ongoing and proposed priorities for ACCAN in the year ahead:

- NBN services and rollout
- Universal Service reform
- Broadband performance
- Affordability
- Financial hardship

A specific concern with all member groups at the Forum was around consumer digital competency / confidence. There is a need for comprehensive consumer education programs. The digital divide is not going away and needs to be addressed before less confident consumers are left behind for good.

## Strategic approach

### Opportunities to advocate

Internet Australia advised that they have gained an opportunity to advocate by creating a Parliamentary “friends of the internet” group which will be meeting after the July Federal election. Internet Australia sponsors the group and will be using it as a vehicle to present ideas and issues to its Parliamentary members. Internet Australia is aiming to hold events in the late afternoon on Tuesdays or Wednesdays during Parliamentary sitting weeks. It was suggested that ACCAN may wish to co-sponsor these events.

## Conclusion

The feedback and suggestions made at the Members’ Advisory Forum will be used to inform ACCAN’s policy priorities, operations plan and research activity plan for 2016-17. Once these have been finalised they will be circulated to MAF attendees.

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