



# Final Report

Final report to the Department of Communications and the Arts  
as part of fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Multi-year Funding Agreement 2012-2017

For the period  
1 September 2012 – 30 May 2017  
Submitted 15 June 2017

Version for  
Public Release



## **About ACCAN**

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation representing individuals, small businesses and not-for-profit groups as consumers of communications products and services. ACCAN focuses on goods and services encompassed by the converged areas of telecommunications, broadcasting, the internet and online services, including both current and emerging technologies.

We aim to empower consumers to make good choices about products and services. As a peak body, ACCAN will represent the views of its broad and diverse membership base to policy makers, government and industry to get a better outcome for all communications consumers. Member groups include community legal centres, disability advocates, indigenous organisations, financial counsellors, regional organisations, farmers' federations, parents groups, seniors organisations and other individual members.

The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

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# 1. Summary for Publication

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Over the period 1 September 2012 – 30 May 2017 ACCAN has represented Australian communications consumers consistently and effectively in fulfilment of the requirements of its contract with the Department of Communications and the Arts. In the period under examination ACCAN has produced 173 submissions and 16 policy positions, issued 51 tip sheets and 114 media releases, and published 166 blogs and 18 magazines. In addition ACCAN has commissioned and completed 27 research projects, completed 31 projects under the Independent Grants Scheme and held 35 events with over 2,000 attendees altogether.

ACCAN has become the first point of call for many in the media for communications consumer matters with ACCAN cited over 4,000 times across radio, television, print and online media. ACCAN's own social media following is over 5,500 and its highly accessible (W3C AAA) website has received just under 800,000 visits. These and other achievements are listed below.

## 2012-2013

- The revised Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code came into force in September 2012. ACCAN launched the *Making the Right Call* consumer guide – to date more than 5000 copies have been distributed.
- ACCAN achieved a big win for the Deaf community with our recommendations being implemented in two new services (SMS relay and video relay) offered under the National Relay Service.
- ACCAN engaged with Telstra to ameliorate the loss of the highly effective TISSC (190 complaints). ACCAN negotiated an outcome to ensure transparency in future 190 InfoCall Code amendments and maintain a consultation process. The wind-up of TISSC resulted in \$95,000 being given to ACCAN to use for research on premium services in the future.
- Introduction of an industry standard for global roaming for telecommunications providers to inform their customers of exactly how much they will be charged when they make a call, send a text, or go online using their mobile phone when overseas.
- Introduction of Critical Information Summaries and usage alerts for consumers when they have used 50%, 85% and 100% of their monthly allowance for phone and data in Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code. The use of the word 'Cap' was also banned in the new Code.
- Events:
  - ACCAN App launched at Parliament House (downloads reach 12,000 in first month)
  - Delivering for Consumers – ACCAN National Conference 2012
  - Phone Problems & Consumer Rights Workshop in Darwin

## 2013-2014

- ACCAN worked closely with Industry and the Department of Communications on the new Coalition Government's deregulation agenda with the majority of our proposals for short term reform being adopted.



- ACCAN concerns at the harm caused by in-app purchases helped lead to ACCC initiatives to publicise risks and work with over the top providers to improve information and warnings especially for parents.
- ACCAN joined the fight to kill CAPTCHA, the annoying and discriminatory tests used by websites to prove users are human. Google subsequently improved its CAPTCHA service. Telstra made a commitment to remove all CAPTCHAs on their website.
- ACCAN research identifies unfair contract terms being used by broadband provider, Netspeed, to the ACCC. This led to the ACCC's first action on unfair contracts. The ACCC indicated that it would move to take more enforcement actions for unfair contract terms.
- Liaison with industry on the findings of our fine print study of telecommunications contracts resulted in updated contracts to make them fairer and more accurate.
- ACCAN worked with industry and the ACCC to remove misleading advertising claiming an offer is 'unlimited', when in fact it is not. The resultant ACCC enforcement undertaking by Medion makes clear that such claims are unacceptable under the Australian Consumer Law.
- ACCAN successfully negotiated with fixed line resellers ACN and Optus to drop the Silent Line charge. This follows Telstra's agreement to no longer charge the fee to vulnerable consumers. It is a significant benefit for at risk individuals, who can now maintain fixed line privacy at no cost.
- ACCAN's global roaming research in October 2013, helped drive more roaming friendly plans with providers eventually introducing roaming packs that cost between \$5-\$10 per day.
- ACCAN helped put mobile network expansion on the agenda through our key stakeholder engagement.
- Our influential contribution to the International Standards Organisation work on a mobile payments standard received international commendations.
- Events:
  - First ACCAN International event – M-Enabling Australasia in Sydney 2013
  - Roundtable on Accessible ICT Procurement 2013
  - Connecting the Country – Rural, Regional and Remote Mobile Forum – leads to publication of first edition of ACCAN Mobile Black Spots Community Kit 2014

## 2014-2015

- In 2015 registrations on the Do Not Call Register were made indefinite. This is a change that ACCAN had been calling for over a number of years.
- ACCAN's continued work regarding 1800 number calls from mobile phones paid off in 2015 as the majority of Australian mobile phone consumers are no longer paying for these.
- After many years of calling for real-time usage alerts, Telstra listened to consumers and took action introducing these in late 2014. ACCAN called on other mobile providers to introduce real-time alerts as well.
- Virgin Mobile introduced data rollover plans after ACCAN had called for this change for a number of years.
- The Federal Government showed it had listened to ACCAN and other community groups when it announced the significant expansion of mobile network coverage through the Mobile Black Spot Programme.
- ACCAN worked with other disability focused groups to successfully lobby the Federal Department of Finance to adopt an international standard for accessibility as a desirable

requirement to be taken into account in assessing successful tender bids for ICT hardware and services.

- Work for more accessible communications services contributes to the introduction of a 15 month trial of audio description on ABC iview, and maintaining accountability for captioning quotas on free to air TV.
- ACCAN worked with the telco industry and the content industry to ensure consumer concerns were adopted in the development of the Copyright Notice Scheme Industry Code.
- ACCAN took an active role in the Federal Government's drive to reduce unnecessary regulation in the communications sector. Our engagement with industry and Government facilitated deregulation in a number of areas, leading to considerable cost savings. ACCAN also identified touch points where significant consumer protections would be undermined if regulatory underpinnings were removed.
- In late 2014 ACCAN launched its Hardship Portal – a set of resources for consumers who are unable to pay their phone or internet bills.
- ACCAN significantly raise awareness of the need for reform of the Universal Service Obligation amongst key stakeholders
- Events:
  - Connecting Today's Consumer 2014
  - Rethinking the Universal Service Obligation 2015

## 2015-2016

- The proposed three strikes Copyright Notice Scheme was abandoned after rights holders and industry were not able to reach an agreement on funding the scheme.
- After our calls for increased consumer protections, Telstra and Optus implemented double opt-in measures for Direct Carrier Billing.
- In August, ACCAN along with Standards Australia and the Federal Department of Finance, announced that Australia would adopt a Standard for accessible ICT procurement.
- ACCAN put the spotlight on megabyte rounding – a practice that saw consumers being ripped off. This raised consumer awareness and supported better industry practice of kilobyte unit charging resulting in fairer mobile plans for consumers.
- Events:
  - Dollars and Bytes – Communications affordability now and tomorrow 2015
  - Meet the People Forum 2016

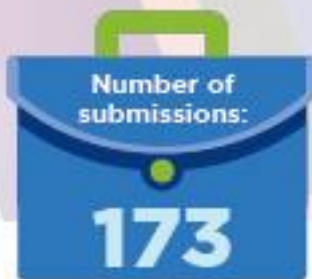
## 2016-2017

- ACCC commits to broadband performance monitoring and sets broadband performance as an issue of high priority with ACCAN as a key influencer towards this goal
- ADSL availability map and tool highlights gaps in broadband availability moving into the new era of depleted ADSL services while the NBN is completed
- Significant work over a number of years paid off when Standards Australia and the Federal Department of Finance announced (in conjunction with ACCAN) the adoption of an internationally aligned standard for ICT accessibility in procurement
- ACMA Revised identity-checking requirements for prepaid mobile services



- Representatives from ACCAN attended a community meeting about the Belmond on Clyde estate where some residents have had no internet or voice connections since November last year. In late March, nbn provided an emergency solution to get residents connected.
- In April, the Department of Communications and the Arts announced a new working group that will investigate how audio-described programs can be delivered on Australian television
- In August 2016, our submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry on data availability and use looked at the consumer aspects of having data available in an open, accessible and standardised format.
- Events:
  - ACCANect 2016
  - Regional and Remote Advisory Forum leading to the RRRCC
  - ACCAN-UNSW IoT Security Workshop 2017

# HIGHLIGHTS



Hot Issues  
blog articles:

