

Quarter 3, FY17-18

The summary below outlines ACCAN's activities from 1 December – 28 February 2018.

The last quarter has been extremely active in the telecommunications sector, with the numerous inquiries and code reviews in train. The ACCAN policy team has been actively engaged with these and other developments. It is pleasing that we have continued to achieve significant impact through our representation of consumer interests. In particular the ACMA and Ministerial announcements regarding development of the Complaints Handling Standard, Connection Assurance Standard, Record Keeping Rule and Service Provider Rule for RSP line testing reflected many of the issues ACCAN has been raising about the NBN migration and general performance of telcos.

The Policy Team has consulted with ACCAN members and more broadly on consumer policy positions in 12 submissions during the quarter, as well as multiple submissions to Communications Alliance on the review of the TCP Code. We have engaged in numerous meetings and briefings with industry and government stakeholders in the process. Our work is supported by commissioned research and a wide range of other evidence, to ensure our representation of consumer interests is sound and accurate.

The ACCAN Grants Team established contracts with all of the nine grants recipients and submitted copies of the contracts to the Department. The majority of projects have commenced their work with ACCAN staff giving guidance on key issues. Two new research projects have commenced, and the results from a joint project with SACOSS was released to highlight the amount of expenditure households within Australia spend on telecommunications. Telecommunications are a significant household expenditure and on average, households spend more on telecommunications than on energy. Furthermore, telecommunications expenditure is significantly regressive, accounting for nearly three times the proportion of household disposable income for the lowest income quintile as for the highest quintile; single person households, pensioners and other social security recipients, and those renting (particularly from state housing authorities) spend proportionately more of their income on telecommunications than other households. The net result of massively increased usage but decreasing prices is that for average households telecommunications expenditure has declined in real terms and as a proportion of household income in the last 6 years. However, the same is not true for the lowest income quintile households where telecommunications expenditure has increased in real terms, as has the telecommunications share of household expenditure. New projects cover consumer expectations of telecommunications customer service and barriers faced by renters.

From 1 December, 2017 – 28 February, 2018, ACCAN published six news stories. “All we want in 2018 is #BetterBushComms” summarised the activities of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition in its first year as a cohesive group. The blog post was published on the ACCAN website, on the National Farmers Website and in ACCAN’s Summer 2018 magazine.

ACCAN published phone and internet tips for consumers over the holiday period. The tips included aimed to help consumers control their mobile data usage, pick a global roaming plan, pick an NBN plan or effectively make a complaint or seek compensation for outages. When the ACCC announced that TPG would provide remedies to nearly 8,000 customers who were sold unattainable NBN speeds, ACCAN updated its article which summarised this issue for consumers. The article outlines who may be affected and what consumers should do if they think they are entitled to a remedy.

A blog post published in early January welcomed Telstra’s announcement that it would scrap fees for having a silent line. ACCAN stated that this was a positive move for consumers, especially those

whose safety could be compromised if personal information is published in a directory such as the White Pages. A blog post from early February outlined ACCAN's recommendations for telecommunications initiatives that should receive funding in the 2018-19 Federal Budget. The blog gave an overview of issues including mobile coverage expansion, affordability measures, NBN switchover and accessibility of telecommunications services.

The ACCAN Summer 2018 Magazine – Lifting the NBN fog – was published in December. It featured articles on policy developments in the NBN space, the TCP Code Review, new ACCAN Grants projects and the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition.

ACCAN participated in a range of meetings reflecting much of the various reforms being canvassed this quarter. ACCAN participated in meetings of a total of 8 different representative bodies including several meetings of the CA Working Committee reviewing the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code, and other codes under review such as the Mobile Base Station Deployment Code. ACCAN is actively involved in the review of Australia's domain name regulation and policies. There were 7 meetings with government and regulatory bodies and 5 industry liaison and engagement meetings.

The ACCAN Board is scheduled to meet on 8 March. At its November meeting Heron Loban was co-opted to fill a gap in skills, as the Board considered it would benefit from additional connections and experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Heron has previously held a seat on the ACCAN Board. The ACCAN Board's Finance & Audit Committee reviewed the Risk Management Plan and have submitted the updated plan to the Board for approval at its March meeting.

ACCAN's Google sponsored internship was filled and Jelena Ardalic completed a project examining Smartphone Biometrics. Her report is being reviewed for publication.

Between 1 December, 2017 – 28 February, 2018, ACCAN generated 92 media mentions across national print, online, TV and radio. This is an average of 31 items per month. The majority of ACCAN's coverage (54 per cent) was in online articles. Print articles made up 33 per cent of the coverage, while radio made up 11 per cent and TV accounted for two per cent. ACCAN published six news stories and its Summer 2018 Magazine – Lifting the NBN fog. It featured articles on policy developments in the NBN space, the TCP Code Review, new ACCAN Grants projects and the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition.