JULIE McCROSSIN: Has anybody not got a number because we're up to our first docket? This lady would be happy with Cadbury! Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to our next session of the 2019 conference. And thank you to those who have been tweeting or Instagramming or Facebooking. Just a reminder #ACCANect2019 is the hashtag to use which again is at the top. Now, the first box of seriously gorgeous individually made chocolates and I don't know if anybody here is old enough to see the Lucille Ball where she's at the chocolate factory. Put your hand up if you've seen that comedy. Just Google it, and just see the glory of a true comedian. Would you, sir, pull the winner and if you win, you can still win, a promise, and the winner is of the first chocolate, E66. Purple E66. I like a squeal of excitement. Is it you? Yes! You didn't squeal, but you looked pleased and I'll settle for that. Can you give her a clap because she is, she's deeply moved.

>> Thank you.

JULIE McCROSSIN: That's great. I am wearing a Garmin. It gives me great pleasure to speak to us the CEO of Optus, Allen Lew. He has an extensive history with experience in telecommunications including in Singapore. He's the former CEO of group digital life and he's also worked at the very senior level with the Singtel Group, Optus and the advanced info service public company limited or AIS, he's chairman of the AIS executive committee and he's also originally an electrical engineer and a Master of science, please welcome Allen Lew. (APPLAUSE)

ALLEN LEW: Good morning everybody. And thank you for inviting me to speak with all of you here today. I want to take a moment to acknowledge that ACCAN's support of Australian consumers has been invaluable for the last more than 10 years. ACCAN plays an important role for our industry. It is the voice of the customer and it is always looking to speak up with Government on behalf of consumers' best interests and promote better informed consumer decisions through research and by providing information. We value our interactions with ACCAN and the learnings that we get as a result. And while we appreciate ACCAN setting the bar of what good customer support looks like, Optus's aim is to go above and beyond this bar. In fact, well above and beyond as evidenced by our company's stated purpose. Optus's purpose is to go further to connect customers to exceptional network, value and service. From the network perspective, our 4G network now covers 97.3% of Australians. We have invested $6 billion over the last four years to densify our networks in metropolitan areas and to extend our coverage in regional Australia. It is wonderful to look at the global statistics because now in terms of mobile broadband Australia is ranked number 8 in the world and if you look at the top 12 operators in the world Australia is the only country to have two mobile operators that are listed in the top 12 fastest mobile networks in the world, the only country. That is something that we in Australia have to be exceptionally proud of. We have two networks that that are in the top 12 in the world and we are unique in this perspective. Secondly, I think from a value perspective we also believe that our mobile and fixed broadband plans coupled with our investment in proprietary content such as Optus Sport which has elite soccer, National geographic as well as Apple music have worked well for us and have let to us being -us engaging with Australian consumers. But while these investments in the network, investments in content and the pricing that we have done has helped win the minds of our customers, and has helped us gain market share over the last few years as evidenced by the sort of reports that have been released, the one main thing that we are working on and is a work in progress is to not just win the minds of Australian consumers but win over the hearts of Australians by giving them outstanding personalised service. Today, I'd like to focus my presentation to all of you on how Optus is differentiating itself in service across three major areas. Number one, doing the right thing by the customer. Number two, investing in technology which will enable us to provide that personalised differentiated service that consumers are craving. And certainly how -what we are doing to share our expertise and passion in digital technologies to help Australians more generally. Let me start by talking about what we're doing to ensure Optus as a company and its 6,000 people do the right thing by our customers. In Optus we have embraced a culture and mindset of love for our customers. And this is ingrained through two things -creating a passion for excellence and ingraining a genuine concern and care for our customers. Every single role in Optus has a customer care component. As a reminder of this we have something called the voice of the customer screens spread throughout our entire campus showing actual customer feedback, both the good as well as the bad. Over the past 12 months as a company we have made significant changes to our operations to ensure that the customer is truly at the centre of every decision we make, and we have even launched our own customer academy for employees. Our employees have embraced these changes as evidenced by the most competitive category in our annual employee excellence awards, the customer focus award. This is an annual award and the nominee's stories demonstrate the personal level of attention our employees focus on to provide our customers with the service that they need and the perseverance with which they will see an issue through to complete resolution. Doing the right thing by the customer also means getting the basics right. One area in which we have invested in is our call centres. Our call centre agents now have more training but more importantly they have greater empowerment and more authority so that they can solve issues without having to transfer calls from one place to another and are not passed around as the vernacular goes. We have added more agents as well, that means we have not only the ability to handle peak loads but what we are going through with the bushfires in northern NSW, we have enough people to handle calls that result from natural calamities and other situations and we also make sure that we measure the impact of this, they are brought on our customers and our ability to handle such calls in an expeditious manner. Complaints are one area where we can evaluate how we're doing. While even one complaint to the T I O or even to myself is one too many, TIO reports do give us an idea of how we are tracking. Our TIO complaint volumes have been decreasing for each report for the last 18 months with a significant drop in the last report and that's mainly through the focus of the Optus team on resolving one of the biggest issues we face as industry which is the customer experience when the move from the existing legacy fixed broadband network to nbn. With an initiative that I was going to talk about later we expect the next TIO report will have a continuation of this declining trend and we won't be using this as an excuse to slack off and will instead double up on our efforts to ensure that our complaints continue to fall. It is probably no surprise to you to hear that one areas that causes customers the most dissatisfaction in their experience today with the telecom industry is the transitioning on to the nbn. And I know every single telco will complain about this process and there are a number of issues customers are confused by the handoff between subcontractors, nbn and RSP, consumers struggle with the installation and broken appointments and the process sometimes lacks visible. That is why I am pleased to announce here today a new and unique service to address this. Instead of whinging, Optus is establishing at its own expense starting something called the Optus nbn champion. For every customer moved from their existing legacy fixed line network we will assign an individual customer care agent to be that one single point of interface between the customer and ourselves and we will take nbn out of this equation so there is one less person to deal with. We are starting off with our own customers who are not HFC and our URL network but we are proactively reaching out to every single customer that moves across to us and we will be that one single point of contact for all customers to manage their transition to nbn and we will also extend this to 30 days from the installation of the nbn service so that customers know that somebody is sitting looking at their respective broadband service to ensure it is delivering the speeds that we have communicated to them in all our fixed broadband plans, this is not a promise to do. We have embedded this since May and we have been gradually rolling out and we are gradually building this up to scale and you can expect that every single nbn interaction for customers that are moving on to the nbn network will get the benefit of this nbn concierge service. Secondly in the area of using technology practically digitalisation technology to improve our customer experience, we have been transforming our business and looking at how we can use digital to provide an always on 24 hours after sales service for every single one of our customers. We spend half a billion dollars upgrading our customer care and billing system, developing an app called the My Optus app that allows customers to interact with us in a way that they are so used to do today which is through an app on their smartphone. This technology will allow us to improve the customers' experience and will use the latest chat bot as well as artificial intelligence technology to make sure that we move from an environment where today we are reacting to customers to one where we can proactively keep customers informed of what is happening with their service though that for example if on one evening we are upgrading the mobile network around them or we are upgrading the fixed network we can tell them about it and if we do see congestion coming up in a certain part of our network we can prime our customers to expect it at a certain time and to tell them what we are doing to avoid that congestion area and ensure that their web surfing experience or their gaming experience is kept optimally. So, we are investing, and we are using these new methods to identify what our customers want and how we can improve and with this information we are making decisions and changes that will result in a much better customer experience. We have provided our customers with more control through additional digital options as well. One such example is our recently launched Optus assistance service where customers can access this little AI, artificial intelligent chat bot, any time they like without queuing. Customers can use this feature to receive personalised answers to questions regarding billing and recontracting and if they get distracted this chat bot is smart enough to even answer questions about the weather in different parts of Australia and what is exciting that is happening so it is truly an amazing piece of technology and we are also highly sensitive to how time poor customers are so we have introduced an additional new digital case management solution which lets our customers raise but more importantly track and update their issue and query across multiple digital channels so consumers can now get back to their day while a case manager is Optus person who is assigned to them after their respective case from start to finish works in the background and to resolve the solution and sends notifications to the customer when there are updates to the case. Turning now to that third item, I wanted to discuss, in addition to looking after telco consumers Optus takes the view that we must look after Australians more broadly in this new era of the if mobile Internet. We have initiatives in place that while is not directly related to our telco responsibilities are part and parcel of being a good corporate citizen and importantly lead the way in good digital citizenship. We believe the strongest contribution can be made by sharing our expertise and our passion to help Australians more generally in this new era that we are moving into. As a key influencer, in the digital landscape, Optus focuses on digital citizenship as a key area of our community involvement. We are committed to building a society of digitally educated people who are safe, responsible, and positive online. Optus has helped play a leadership role in this space by launching our inaugural digital citizenship round table with the theme called Reclaiming Our Humanity in a Digital world. We brought together sector leaders representing a diverse group of external stakeholders to explore how we can work collaboratively in addressing the growing societal changes such as cyber security and cyberbullying. This year we reached a significant milestone with more than 300,000 students receiving digital education under our program since 2013. One such program that we are especially proud of is our Schools Damage Thumbprint initiative. During fun interactive workshops, trained facilitators educate students on the advantages on having a positive online presence. The program provides a digital education that allows students who are typically around grade 6 or 7 to learn skills about managing their online presence. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the bushfire challenge that our country faces at the moment and our commitment to make sure that during such periods Optus is well geared up to handle the needs of the people who have been affected by these bushfires. Let me conclude by stating probably the obvious, that the world we face today is one that is characterised by continuous technology evolution. By consumer behavioural shifts, by regulatory changes and by intensive competition in our industry both from traditional as well as new competitors. In such a turbulent environment the only way to stand out is to be exceptional. At Optus we focus on customer needs and are encouraged to be bold and to be courageous by what -by doing the things that I mentioned above -by providing an exceptional network, exceptional value and most importantly exceptional service. We are as Optus the challenger brand and to survive and more importantly to thrive in today's environment we must offer our customers an exceptional experience. Let me repeat that I still believe that one of the most important things that we as Optus need to be distinctive and singularly focussed on is the way we empower the way we collaborate with each other in the component and the way we push ourselves to make a difference in the lives of our consumers, customers. It is that that allows us as a group of 6,000 ordinary people in Optus to create an extraordinary performance far beyond the sum of the parts for the benefit of all Australians, thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

JULIE McCROSSIN: Thank you very much. Would you mind taking some questions. Thank you very much. Would anyone like to ask a question or make a comment in relation to that presentation? Thank you.

>> I'm Anne Waterford and I'm an individual member. My question is how far out west does your service go in kilometre terms?

ALLEN LEW: Just to be sure, the question is how far west our mobile network goes? In this state or in this country?

>> Well, in this state but also say in Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

ALLEN LEW: OK. It goes right to the far edges of these three states. I think as I have mentioned we cover 97.3% of where Australians live, work and they go for recreation and we back the coverage of our network. As I mentioned if you look at network quality and coverage, you know and the top 12 mobile operators in the world, there are two mobile operators in this country so I think for all intents and purposes we need meet the needs of the bulk of the people here in Australia.

>> Name a western town that you service, please?

ALLEN LEW: In NSW, I've been as far west recently as Dubbo, I've just returned from Albury as well and our network there is exceptionally good. There might be one or two other smaller towns I haven't been to but I'm sure if you look at our network coverage maps we do cover those town, if you look at this country, if you look as far west as the city of Perth and we look down south to Bunbury and Albury we do have excellent coverage in those areas as well.

JULIE McCROSSIN: As someone with a bit of land in Wellington 45 minutes this side of Dubbo this fella deserves a clap for naming Dubbo.

ALLEN LEW: I love the Western Plains Zoo.

>> I had a question about your digital case management. I think it's wonderful you're addressing cybersecurity and cyberbullying. Do you have any consideration about technology facilitated with an intimate partner, violence cases and how that system may affect that, do you have any protections?

ALLEN LEW: I think in this situations like that we work very closely with the authorities to do what is right in such cases. A lot of such cases we work within the framework of the legal sort of framework that's out there and the technologies just a facilitator and in such situations, we will work through the legal enforcement agencies.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Other questions or comments ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

>> I'm with Internet Australia. I'm interested in the changes that you're making at the moment including the concierge service and I applaud the reduction in TIO complaints you're receiving. Are you starting to see an impact from these measures in terms of increased take-up of customers or improvements in the company's bottom-line? Are you starting to see tangible results from these changes?

ALLEN LEW: I think the most important thing for us as evidenced by the very first statement I made is we want to do what's right for the customers. It may not necessarily hit the bottom line immediately but we believe in the long term Optus is here for the long-term as we have shown since our shareholders acquisition of Optus way back in 2000 so I think we will make the necessary investment in the infrastructure but more importantly we also want to make the necessary investment in customers and customers' experience and we don't expect such an investment to give Australia short-term return and we expect longer term results. At the end of the day, the nbn is a national initiative, we believe nbn is good for this country overall and but as with any new network, any new technology there is always some discontinuity to some customer's ability to understand how it works in an environment where there are multiple technologies and multiple service organisations involved. We have taken it upon ourselves at our own consistent to ensure that Australians go through a seamless process as they move on to the next generation fixed line technology and we believe that rather than whinging about what nbn should and should not be doing we believe in not being a victim of circumstance but taking it under our control because we believe at the end of the day the Optus name is here to stay and we want to ensure that the Optus name stands for the three things I talked about -exceptional network, value and of course service as well.

JULIE McCROSSIN: We have time for one more question, thank you.

>> I'm a journalist at the 'Sydney Morning Herald'. Just a quick question on the proposed TGP-Vodafone merger, how will that impact you and will that take market share from you?

ALLEN LEW: I think we have done well with competition today. So with TPG Vodafone merger is before the court, I'm sure the court also make the right decision for the industry but more importantly for consumers in Australia as well so I think we have our own game plan, the three things that I talked about -network, value and service, and we believe that will stand us in good stead regardless of whether or not the merger happens.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Is there anyone else? One last question, thank you very much. I'll come though this lady and then to you and that will the last two. >> My name is Lisa I'm from consumer law action centre. Has Optus done anything since the TIO report around sales practices driving consumer debt?

ALLEN LEW: I think we certainly realised our responsibility as a service provider, we've been actually very active in our discussions with ACCAN about this especially consumers moving from prepaid to post-paid or signing up for a contract more than $1,000 so I think we are looking at that very carefully. I think that ACCAN has issued some guidelines on that and making sure that that is being properly implemented across the whole organisation. It is a very important responsible. We don't want people to take on more their they can bear, and we are fully committed to ensuring that gets implemented properly.

>> Andrew, from Digital Tasmania. We can all agree that the mobile blackspot program encourages organisations to work together, operators and councils states but the nuts and bolts of it are that once -it picks winners basically, one operator or the other and the nuts and bolts say you don't have to build that tower to support anything else and the back is an issue as well. Any thoughts on that program and how you have advocated to open that up so it's more a more infrastructure -it's not an infrastructure-based competition, it's just a more competitive and enables access to more providers at the one site?

ALLEN LEW: The last part of your question actually zeroed in on what's the nub of the problem. I think today the Government does this in consultation with communities. It asks operators to basically ourselves Telstra and Vodafone to give them proposals and it collects the best proposal and a pay station is put up in a rural community. The most important thing after the base station is put up that the base station infrastructure is shared by other operators and that's something not done optimally today and that's something we are working on together with our other service providers to ensure that happens a lot better so I think that is one key thing that perhaps could be done a little bit better and the infrastructure that is there is shared more -in a more equitable fashion with other service providers, that is something as an industry we have to get better at doing.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd ask you to give a round of (APPLAUSE) to Allen Lew. Teresa has some remarks to make.

TERESA CORBIN: In line with what we said earlier that we are acknowledging some industry champions, for some of their contribution to all the work that we have done at ACCAN and improving things for customers and reducing customer harm we want to acknowledge Optus as being a challenger champion because you were the first to compete in Australia and you can't to invest in the network in a hue way and in regional areas you brought choice to many people for the first time and we also want to acknowledge your work with small business and the small business innovation centres, I will...

JULIE McCROSSIN: Make funny faces behind!

ALLEN LEW: Thank you very much.

JULIE McCROSSIN: It's because it's a 10th birthday party.

TERESA CORBIN: That's right.

JULIE McCROSSIN: Put your head in there, love! I tried Allen. I tried!

ALLEN LEW: Tongue in cheek. Thank you so much. You've been a huge inspiration for us.