

# Quarter 4, FY18-19

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The summary below outlines ACCAN's activities from 1 March 2019 – 31 May 2019.

ACCAN completed eight (8) submissions in this funded period 1 March 2019 – 31 May 2019.

These reflected policy priorities for the year and included:

## **Privacy, security and online safety**

- *ACMA's Scam Technology Project* - Emphasised the consumer detriment that results from scam activity and how consumer awareness campaigns are integral part of combating scams.
- *Calling Number Display Guideline* - Highlighted the detriment that can result from unlisted numbers being visible on customer's bills; a serious risk for domestic violence victims.

## **Improving consumer safeguards**

- *Mobile Premium Services Code* - Continued committee code work with Communications Alliance. ACCAN advocated strongly for stricter controls to limit the adverse impact of these services and successfully secured an agreement to lower spending limits. However, ACCAN is not satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed code. This approach has received support from the ACCC and other consumer groups.
- *NBN Access Transfer Industry Code* - The ACCC's Inquiry into NBN Wholesale Service Standards has continued. ACCAN met with the ACCC in May to discuss next steps and consumer concerns. ACCAN continue to advocate for improved reliability of NBN services and of services provided by other networks.
- *Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code* – Worked with member organisations to raise serious concerns with the ACMA about proposed credit assessment and responsible selling provisions in the draft Code. Additionally, ACCAN met with the ACMA Telecommunications Consumer Committee to advocate for further reforms.

## **Better communications for poorly served areas**

- *Record Keeping Rule (RKR) for dark fibre and NBN aggregation services* - ACCAN submitted to the ACCC's consultation on introducing a RKR for dark fibre and NBN aggregation services. The organisations supported the ACCC's proposal to gather more detailed information on the market. However, the ACCC declined the RKR as further information was provided about the market that addressed its concerns.
- *Exemption request under Part 20A of the Telecommunications Act* – Provided input to the Department of Communications and the Arts assessment of an exemption request for a greenfields development in Western Australia. ACCAN's response advocated strongly for consumers to have fixed fibre connections installed in greenfields developments where the location of the development (e.g. in rural bushfire prone areas) is not appropriately served by alternative technologies.

## Improved accessibility

- *Accessibility of Payphones Industry Guideline* – ACCAN completed submission.

Other relevant advocacy has focused significantly on our affordable NBN broadband policy, as well as the adoption of our audio description policy position along with blindness sector consumer organisations.

ACCAN's impact in its engagement with industry, regulators and more broadly has been considerable. On the industry front, Communications Alliance's Mobile Premium Services Working Committee has responded to ACCAN's advocacy with some changes to their position; the ACMA has taken on some consumer feedback on the draft TCP Code; and more broadly ACCAN have achieved recognition and some support for its affordable NBN broadband policy proposal and advocacy for the introduction of audio described content on TV from major political parties. Additionally, community sector support for our affordable broadband policy has continued to grow, with the policy proposal now backed by 11 consumer organisations.

ACCAN's 2019 Grants Round is in its final stages, with Expressions of Interest stage completed and Full Applications now assessed. ACCAN's Research Activity Plan for 2018/19 continues with Spotlight on Telco Commissions and Targets launched and the remaining two pieces Live Caption Quality on Free to Air TV and Time Forgone now contracted and in the field.

From 1 March – 31 May, 2019, ACCAN published five news stories and one edition of the quarterly magazine. In March, ACCAN shared a blog article that outlined the key findings from the Spotlight on Telco Sales Commissions and Targets exploratory research.

In April, ACCAN shared a transcript of ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin's speech to the CommsDay Summit to the ACCAN website. The speech addressed ACCAN's call for affordable broadband for all and the need for stronger consumer protections in the revised TCP Code. Later that month, the organisation shared a series of NBN focused blogs which aimed to explain what the withdrawal of discounts on NBN 12mbps would mean for consumers. ACCAN also created short blog posts that aimed to help consumers understand what speed and how much internet they need for their household.

ACCAN CEO also presented at the ICEGOV international event at RMIT in April in Melbourne and the SACOSS conference in Adelaide, also in April. ACCAN Director of Inclusion presented at CEDA in Perth. ACCAN Director of Policy presented in May at the FCA Conference in Melbourne.

The ACCAN Autumn 2019 Magazine 'No Australian Left Offline' was published in March. It focused on ACCAN's affordable broadband initiative.

ACCAN has 213 members including 111 organisations and 102 individuals. ACCAN is continually working towards being representative of Australian communications consumers and the organisations that represent their interests. The membership base forms only one part of the methodology ACCAN uses to ensure it remains representative of the interests of communications consumers. ACCAN held three Advisory Forums during this quarter including the Indigenous Advisory Forum, the Members Advisory Forum and the Small Business Advisory Forum.

During this quarter, ACCAN representation on formal committees continued to be extensive. The organisation has actively worked on 13 of the 33 committees on which it represents consumers and attended 22 formal meetings.

ACCAN engaged on 43 different occasions with our members and consumers groups and participated in member events. It represented consumer issues to regulators, government bodies and the Ombudsman at 28 meetings. The organisation also represented these issues at 22 different meetings and events with the industry.

ACCAN's Board met held on 7 March 2019 where representatives from the Department of Communications and the Arts also presented on a number of issues.

Between 1 March - 31 May 2019, ACCAN generated 241 media mentions across national print, online, TV and radio. This is an average of 80 items per month. The majority of coverage secured during this quarter was as a result of Google's ban on Huawei.

Other major issues covered in media included overseas bill shock, ACCAN's *Spotlight on Telco Commissions and Sales Targets*, tips for saving money on phones, Telstra's commitment to more reliable landlines, the TPG/VHA merger, and the announcement of Round 4 of the Mobile Black Spots Program.

In this period, ACCAN's NDIA funded National Disability Telecommunications Information and Referral Service with IDEAS otherwise known as the Accessible Telecoms project has continued to thrive. It will soon begin its second phase where we will relaunch the website tools with greater useability and accessibility. The AT team presented to Communications Alliances Industry Consumer Advisory Group and are now in discussion with providers about how they can assist more with the promotion of the service.

ACCAN has completed preparations for the 2019 Grants Round, ready for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) which will be opening 4-22 March. This is the first time ACCAN will run a two-step process calling for EOIs then short listing and requesting full applications from a smaller number of applicants.

The changes being implemented in the 2019 Round have prompted the review of relevant policies and procedures, including on Conflicts of Interest, Appeals, Stakeholder consultation and how best to support and strengthen the Grants Program into the future. In accordance with DOCA requirements, ACCAN surveyed six of its stakeholders in December regarding priority topics for the 2019 Round. All stakeholders responded and their views were incorporated, with the resulting Priority Themes being:

- Priority Theme 1 - Consumer privacy and security, especially in relation to the Internet of Things (IOT)
- Priority Theme 2 - Access to communications in regional, rural, and remote communities, including Indigenous communities
- Priority Theme 3 - Emerging technologies, for example, accessibility for people with disabilities using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Other topics which can demonstrate direct alignment with ACCAN's strategic plan may also be considered.

ACCAN's research plan for 2018/19 also continues to be implemented with a project, *Incentives & sales practices*, undertaken with Lonergan Research that is due for publication in March. As reported in the last report, findings highlight pressure on front-line sales staff to meet individual and store targets which can result in some instances of inappropriate selling practices, including convincing customers to purchase products/services they do not fully understand and 'hiding' extra items in bills. Two other projects are about to be contracted with external agencies: *Live Caption Quality on Free to Air TV* and *Time Forgone* which will be assessing the impact on consumers of poor complaint handling processes.