



20th April 2021

Infrastructure Australia
21/126 Phillip St
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Industry submissions for Infrastructure Australia's Regional Strengths and Gaps project

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) thanks Infrastructure Australia for the opportunity to contribute to its Industry consultation for the Regional Strengths and Gaps project. We commend Infrastructure Australia on this initiative.

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 is a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), a group of organisations representing the businesses, communities and families of rural and regional Australia. The group was formed to highlight our collective concern about the lack of equitable access to reliable and quality telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Appropriately addressing gaps in telecommunications infrastructure will have a significant impact on communications consumers, particularly those in regional, rural and remote Australia. This includes people in remote Indigenous communities. Consumers are increasingly reliant on telecommunications products and services, and infrastructure in Australia's regions must meet consumer need.

As a peak organisation, ACCAN does not have granular data on each region's infrastructure strengths and gaps, however we would like to highlight recent research which presents both strengths and weaknesses in relation to telecommunications infrastructure in regional and rural Australia. We also identify resources for communities to use in working with the industry to improve local communications infrastructure.

Wamboin Communications Action Group

The Wamboin Communications Action Group (WCAG) is an initiative of residents of the Wamboin, Bywong and Sutton regional area who were concerned that they would be receiving NBN SkyMuster satellite service, with no reasonable possibility of being upgraded to either wireless or fibre. The group was successful in gaining the attention of locals, media, state and federal politicians as well as a number of commercial network providers, and was able to lobby politicians to gain a \$5m grant towards the cost of a commercially viable solution for connectivity. WCAG have produced a report into how they achieved this outcome, providing guidance to other communities across Australia with

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)
Australia's peak body representing communications consumers

PO Box 639, Broadway NSW 2007

Tel: (02) 9288 4000 | Fax: (02) 9288 4019 | Contact us through the [National Relay Service](#)

www.accan.org.au | info@accan.org.au | [twitter: @ACCAN_AU](https://twitter.com/ACCAN_AU) | www.facebook.com/accanau

similar aspirations to improve network capability to meet current and future telecommunications needs.¹

Remote Indigenous Communications Review

In June 2020, ACCAN commissioned a review of programs that support telecommunications and internet access in Remote Indigenous Communities (RICs) and any gaps or outstanding needs identified by community stakeholders. This report views infrastructure broadly to include last mile infrastructure such as Wi-Fi and community access facilities. The report provides a summary of the effectiveness of existing programs, and gaps within current state, territory and federal government and external investment in improving digital inclusion in RICs.² Despite infrastructure being increasingly available in remote communities, this report found that there are still significant gaps in access and usage of communications technologies.

ACCAN's community consultation guide

Mobile coverage is a key issue for consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Mobile Black Spot Program has delivered improvements to mobile coverage, but the demand for these improvements far outstrip supply. ACCAN has created a guide, in consultation with mobile network operators, that sets out steps to help communities understand what mobile network operators look for when deciding where to invest, and how to put together an effective business case for investment. It also contains information on who communities can contact and potentially partner with to achieve results.³

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide feedback on the infrastructure strengths and gaps in Australia's regions. Please do not hesitate to contact ACCAN should you require any additional information about any of the research reports we have outlined in our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Ward
Economic Advisor

¹ Wamboin Communications Action Group, 2021, *Achieve better broadband for Regional Communities (ABBRC). How to establish a community group.*
<https://accan.org.au/files/Grants/Better%20Broadband%20How%20to%20Establish%20a%20Community%20Group.doc.pdf>

² Featherstone, D. 2020. *Remote Indigenous Communications Review.*
https://accan.org.au/files/Reports/ACCAN_Remote%20Indigenous%20Communications%20Review_.pdf

³ ACCAN, *Community Consultation Guide*, 2nd ed. <http://accan.org.au/files/Community%20Kits%20-%20Mar16%20-%20Web%20Version.pdf>