

8 November 2019



The House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

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Via email: communications.reps@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into 5G in Australia

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into 5G in Australia.

ACCAN is the peak body that represents all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. ACCAN provides a strong unified voice to industry and government as consumers work towards communications services that are trusted, inclusive and available for all. ACCAN is keen to ensure that the voices and experiences of consumers are appropriately reflected in Australia's adoption of 5G networks.

Terms of Reference

1. Investigate the capability, capacity and deployment of 5G;
2. Understand the application of 5G, including use cases for enterprise and government.

In our following response to the Terms of Reference, ACCAN will address the following issues;

- Consumer benefits of 5G deployment,
- The need for trusted consumer information,
- Consumer consultation on deployment of 5G network devices, and
- Recommendations for industry and government in the deployment of 5G in Australia.

Introduction

The overwhelming uptake of digital technologies has had significant benefits for the majority of Australian consumers. Increased economic, social and community participation has been made possible, in part, from the introduction of new technologies enabled by ever-faster mobile broadband networks. The anywhere, anytime, any device activities have become the norm in modern day Australia.

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Australia's peak body representing communications consumers

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ACCAN understands that this increasing appetite for digitally driven capabilities requires increased network speed and capacity. As such ACCAN is keen to see Australian consumers reap the opportunities and benefits that the deployment of 5G will provide. However, ACCAN is aware that as with all new technologies, there is a certain amount of hyperbole which may not always provide an accurate picture of these technologies for consumers. As noted in the above information about ACCAN, one of our key priorities is to ensure that consumers have up-to-date, independent and trustworthy information. ACCAN expects that trustworthy consumer information will be critical in the roll-out of 5G. We are already seeing overzealous pronouncements on the capabilities of 5G before it has been fully deployed in Australia, including insufficient consumer information about the actual capability of 5G networks.¹

ACCAN expects the telecommunications industry and the Australian Government to ensure that consumers are fully aware of the true benefits and any potential problems with introducing 5G.

Consumer Benefits from 5G

The deployment of 5G technology promises significant gains across the whole society – from high capacity mobile telephony to increased Internet of Things (IOT) adoption and the potential for remote medical interventions.

ACCAN is aware that there is considerable research available promoting the economic and technology benefits of 5G. The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) has engaged in developing a wealth of well researched and supported evidence on the multi-faceted economic and productivity benefits for Australia with the deployment of 5G networks.² The benefits of high speed, low latency mobile broadband have been widely reported along with the significant benefits 5G will provide to the ever-expanding Internet of Things, with vast numbers of connected devices and data producing activities.

ACCAN would additionally like to highlight some of the less visible yet highly beneficial outcomes for consumers that 5G can provide. The increased capacity speed of 5G mobile technology will be a potential boon for those consumers who rely exclusively on mobile broadband. For many Australians mobile handsets are the sole connection to our increasingly digitised society. Reliable and affordable 5G access will mean that these consumers will have greater access to online opportunities such as online education, access to social services and employment opportunities, as well as greater access to community and cultural participation. Thus, as the only gateway to the digital economy for some consumers, mobile access via affordable 5G will potentially be the defining factor for the inclusion of these consumers in our digital economy.

However, in order for all Australians to benefit and reap opportunities from 5G, the deployment of this next generation network needs to be ubiquitous, resilient and affordable. Additionally however, there is considerable scope for greater consumer education and awareness of the benefits and opportunities offered by 5G. For example, recent research

¹ <https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2019/10/optus-5g-australia/>

² See Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association 'What is 5G' <https://amta.org.au/what-is-5g/>

indicates that approximately 20 per cent of Australians consider 5G as a potential data security risk.³

The need for trusted consumer information

ACCAN is very aware that there is considerable concern within the community about health impacts from increased electromagnetic energy (EME). A 2019 Roy Morgan survey indicated that 26.1 per cent of Australians surveyed have concerns about the health implications of 5G technology.⁴ While ACCAN is not in a position to make a determination on any potential negative health or environmental impact from the increased spectrum use which underpins 5G technology, ACCAN recommends ongoing monitoring and research into any effects of this increased spectrum use. If 5G is to be deployed successfully with support and uptake of services from Australians then there needs to be a strong relationship of trust between all stakeholders. ACCAN expects policy makers, regulators, industry and academia to all play a vital role in ensuring that the Australian community at large have access to understandable, independently verified and comprehensive testing and reporting as the 5G deployment occurs. ACCAN is aware that in a number of jurisdictions internationally there have been restraints put on the deployment of 5G until further research has been undertaken regarding the health and environmental impacts of increased EME as a result of 5G deployment, and the increased interconnectivity of devices that 5G allows.⁵

ACCAN has been an active member of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency Electromagnetic Energy Reference Group and will continue to participate to ensure that independent, reliable and up-to-date health information is made available to the public through this agency's ongoing research.

Consumer consultation on deployment of network devices

ACCAN is aware of concern within the community regarding the rules pertaining to installation of 5G infrastructure. ACCAN understands that the majority of 5G infrastructure deployment is regulated by the Telecommunications (Low-impact Facilities) Determination 2018,⁶ which exempts small sized infrastructure from the rules outlined in the Mobile Base Station Deployment Code.⁷ The Code is intended to allow communities and councils to have greater participation in decisions about the location of mobile base stations, and to supplement the legal requirements at a state and local government level.

With the increasing implementation of IOT devices and services, this potentially will increase the deployment of more equipment within the public landscape. Partnerships between Governments, industry and the community will be paramount in order for the successful roll-out of 5G and IOT infrastructure. ACCAN supports the initiative undertaken by the Melbourne city council as it investigates holistic pathways to implement 5G and IOT throughout the city.⁸ ACCAN believes that this type of multi-stakeholder Testbed initiative

³ See Roy Morgan Findings 'Australians Need Convincing on the Benefits of 5G Technology' <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/8086-perceptions-of-5g-june-2019-201908120817>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Brussels Times article

<https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/world-all-news/77167/huawei-to-spend-us40-billion-on-supplies-from-europe-in-five-years-to-offest-u-s-ban/>

and <https://lenews.ch/2019/09/27/thousands-protest-against-5g-mobile-rollout-in-swiss-capital/>

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2018L00170>

⁷ <https://www.commsalliance.com.au/Documents/all/codes/c564>

⁸ See City of Melbourne Council 5G and IOT Testbed <https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/5g-iot-testbed>

could be widely adopted across Australia to ensure that 5G deployment provides equitable advantages throughout every sector of society.

Recommendations for industry and government in the deployment of 5G in Australia

As stated ACCAN recommends that;

1. The deployment of 5G progresses under a multi-stakeholder approach, with governments, industry and the community working collaboratively in accordance with broader societal principles of increased participation and prosperity for all Australians;
2. Government and industry take a pro-active approach to ensuring that the community's concerns are addressed, up-to-date and independent evidence guides decision making;
3. The telecommunications industry consult with communities in the deployment of 5G infrastructure;
4. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and the Department of Communications and the Arts (DoCA) monitor the safe deployment of 5G and related technologies across Australia;
5. Government, industry and Standards bodies all work collaboratively to ensure that Australia's 5G network is safe, reliable and provides benefits for all Australians.

ACCAN is available to discuss further, any of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

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