# Submission: Consumer representation: Review of section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* Issues paper

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Yes

## Date of submission

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## Name and contact details of person/organisation making submission

Associate Professor Ellie Rennie

Swinburne Institute for Social Research

Swinburne University of Technology

## General comments

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the review of section 593 of the Telecommunications Act. The following submission represents my views, rather than those of Swinburne University. I am a current member of the ACCAN Grants Advisory Panel, the committee that assesses ACCAN’s grants scheme and provides advice on the administration of the scheme. I joined the committee in 2016 and have assessed one round of applications. I received a grant from ACCAN’s grants scheme in 2010.

## Response

## 6. Do you believe research funded through the IGP is useful to consumers? Could changes be made to the IGP to make the funded research projects more useful to consumers?

ACCAN’s grants scheme is focused on consumers. From my experience, the successful grants are those that seek to produce applied outcomes, or that will advance our understanding of consumer needs. Researchers seeking to generate ‘pure’ academic knowledge are encouraged to apply elsewhere.

The ‘usefulness’ of research to consumers is difficult to measure. Research findings are taken up by the wider community, and this is not always easy to track. Altmetrics could be used to gain a better understanding of how the research disseminates beyond citations if this is important to government. Having ACCAN administer the scheme means that the findings can be more widely disseminated than they would otherwise be.

## 7. Is it appropriate for the Government to continue to provide grants to a consumer representative group (or any other non-government body) to undertake research into telecommunications issues?

I believe it is appropriate for government to administer funding through a consumer group for the following reasons:

* ACCAN’s staff are experts on telecommunications issues and are well-placed to administer funding for research in this area.
* Telecommunications is a rapidly changing field and research that is dedicated to consumer issues is essential.
* It is important that funding be available for research that is initiated and led by non-academic institutions. Many of the organisations that apply for ACCAN funding are exempt from Australian Research Council (ARC) funding, yet these organisations have direct contact with consumers and important knowledge of the factors leading to digital exclusion, privacy concerns etc. In addition, the scheme provides funds for academic researchers to ‘pilot’ projects and develop partnerships with industry and NGOs. ARC funding is intended for projects that have already conducted pilots and developed partnerships; ACCAN’s scheme makes future research possible.
* The Grants Advisory Panel are independent of ACCAN, ensuring that the process meets academic ‘peer-review’ standards.

## 8. If this is appropriate, what changes (if any) would you recommend to how the funding is provided and who it is provided to?

Some projects that apply do not succeed as they do not include qualified researchers on the team. More ‘match-making’ between researchers and community groups would be beneficial, possibly through a two-stage application process (expression of interest, then invited to apply).

In my opinion, the ACCAN grants scheme should not be funding community groups to undertake consultancies, particularly if the consultant is not named or her/his credentials not specified. Such basic data collection and analysis could be undertaken by ACCAN as part of its general remit rather than through the grants scheme. In addition, the best projects are those that lead to further research. For example, the ACCAN grant that I received in 2010 enabled an important and long-term collaboration between Swinburne, the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) and the Central Land Council. The project later received ARC funding (ACCAN was a partner on the Linkage grant), and has produced significant knowledge and tangible outcomes (see http://networkcultures.org/blog/publication/no-19-internet-on-the-outstation-the-digital-divide-and-remote-aboriginal-communities/). For instance, CAT’s mobile hotspot project could be considered an extension of that work.