



ACCAN Review
Department of Communications and the Arts
PO Box 13310, Law Courts
MELBOURNE VIC 8010

To the Review team

Re: Consumer representation: Review of section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997

Indigenous Remote Communications Association is a national peak body representing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasting, media and communications industry. We are submitting this proposal based on our experience over the last 15 years as the peak body for the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media sector.

First of all, we would like to endorse and support the submission to this review from the Broadband for the Bush Alliance (B4BA), of which IRCA is a founding member and a key contributor to that submission. As such, IRCA will not provide specific responses in this submission to the questions posed in the Issues Paper.

Rather, this submission outlines our support for ACCAN's work, our close working relationship with ACCAN, and the specific areas where IRCA would like to see more resources provided to ensure adequate representation and support.

IRCA has found ACCAN to be a very effective and accessible consumer advocacy body representing the broad range of consumer needs and issues, with a particular focus on vulnerable and special needs consumers. ACCAN effectively covers a vast spectrum of areas relating to telecommunications - policy and regulation, technical, industry liaison, research, knowledge sharing and consumer rights and awareness.

IRCA has worked closely with ACCAN in co-hosting the annual Indigenous Focus Day, as part of the Broadband for the Bush Forum, over the last four years. IRCA has had representatives on ACCAN's Indigenous Advisory Forum over several years. IRCA is an ACCAN member and has presented at two of the annual ACCAN conferences and have attended several of their forums. Through Broadband for the Bush Alliance, IRCA has worked closely with ACCAN on sharing information and developing specific policy for remote, rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers.

In all of our dealings with ACCAN, we have found their staff very helpful, knowledgeable and cooperative. They have helped us to raise awareness at a policy level of the specific communications challenge for remote Indigenous communities and people. ACCAN has supported a few research projects and awareness campaigns through their Grants program relevant to this constituency.

However, the CEO and policy staff have acknowledged that ACCAN does not have the resources or expertise to provide more specialist attention to the specific consumer issues of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is completely understandable given their broad brief. For this reason, ACCAN is heavily reliant on IRCA, B4BA and other community organisations to inform their advocacy and understanding of consumer issues in this area.

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IRCA has played a representative role over many years to ensure that the telecommunications needs of remote Indigenous communities and consumers are understood and represented at a national level. IRCA has a representative on the ACMA Consumer Consultative Forum as well as several other committees relating to digital inclusion, communications infrastructure and cyber-safety. However, IRCA receives no funding or assistance to undertake this research and advocacy work, which is supplementary to our primary role as peak body for Indigenous media organisations.

IRCA has taken on this important role simply because there is no other national agency able to effectively represent and communicate with the most disadvantaged consumer group in Australia in terms of communications access, digital literacy and awareness of consumer rights.

IRCA and its membership of Indigenous media organisations have a unique understanding of the specific context and challenges of remote Indigenous communities across Australia. Remote Indigenous Media Organisations can play a key role in disseminating locally targeted information by radio, TV, print and online, in language where required. Our sector is carrying out an important community engagement and awareness role around telecommunications needs that deserves dedicated government funding.

The unique challenges for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders include low English literacy, socio-economic and housing conditions, cyber-safety, limited backhaul and data capacity, remoteness and coverage issues, localised community access solutions, limited options for purchasing and servicing ICT equipment, and lack of appropriate training and technical support. As the NBN satellite services and expansion of mobile coverage become available in more communities, and government and business services increasingly move online, there is a significant need for effective consumer information and digital literacy strategies.

Without effective targeted representation and support for these communities to ensure people are able to get connected, safely and with confidence, there is a real risk that the digital divide will increase not reduce.

In summary, IRCA is very supportive of the work of ACCAN as a national consumer representative agency. However, the diversity of the needs across Australia requires supplementary funding for other agencies, including IRCA and the Indigenous media sector, to undertake consumer needs research, awareness campaigns and targeted solutions to remote Indigenous people and communities.

IRCA would be happy to provide more detailed policy documents and evidence of the challenges faced by remote Indigenous people, as well as the impact of effective models of access and inclusion, upon request.

Yours sincerely



Daniel Featherstone
General Manager

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