Rethinking the Indigenous Communications Program

Developed by Broadband for the Bush Alliance

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Broadband for the Bush Alliance is:

Australian Communications Consumers Action Network, Central Desert Shire Council, Central Land Council, Centre for Appropriate Technology, Centre for Remote Health, Desert Knowledge Australia, Frontier Services, Indigenous Remote Communications Association, Katherine Town Council, Ninti One, Regional Development Australia Northern Territory, Remote Area Planning and Development Board, Swinburne University of Technology

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Executive Summary

Indigenous Communications

Over the years, governments have put in place a range of initiatives aimed at improving communications in remote Indigenous communities. However, high levels of digital inequality still exist in many communities around Australia. Indigenous Remote Media Association (IRCA) highlights this point, saying 'most remote Indigenous people currently have limited access and usage of ICTs', and further that, 'limited access to IT facilities, training, relevant on-line content and service delivery, and affordable broadband services will increase the digital divide'.[1] As the rest of Australia become increasingly connected to broadband through the rollout of the NBN, it is critical that government recognise the risk for remote Indigenous Australia if the divide does indeed increase, and continue to commit to addressing this issue.

With rollout of the Indigenous Communications Program (ICP) to new locations due to finish mid this year, it is both timely, and important, that we reflect on the successes of the program, and discuss what improvements can be made for the future direction of remote Indigenous communications. Building on the notions of sustainability, recurrent well-directed funding, and effective and ongoing engagement with remote communities, there is an opportunity, through appropriate use of the NBN, to make significant and lasting improvements to remote Indigenous communications.

About this document

Rethinking the Indigenous Communications Program, prepared by the Broadband for the Bush Alliance (B4BA) working group, and with input from the B4BA social inclusion working group, aims to provide practical advice on the program's future direction. Produced from an original discussion paper circulated among the B4BA working groups, this document outlines key areas where changes and improvements are needed to successfully address the digital literacy of Indigenous Australians in remote Australia and ensure they are better equipped to participate in Australia's digital economy.

Firstly, the existing ICP and associated trials taking place in 2013 are briefly outlined. The document then looks at specific features of the internet access element of the ICP that could have been delivered in a more appropriate way, with practical, evidence based solutions suggested to improve identified problems. Complementing the ICP with other initiatives, primarily the improvement of mobile coverage in remote communities, is then discussed. Finally, application and content programs that are relevant and engaging for remote Indigenous Australia are explored and encouraged as part of a revised ICP.

Findings

- Indigenous and community organisations, and NGOs, need to play a greater role in the delivery of any future communications programs directed at remote Indigenous communities.
- Funding should be targeted to suit the needs of individual communities, recognising the different circumstances of remote communities.
- Relevant, ongoing training that empowers Indigenous people to take ownership and responsibility of community services should be part of any future programs.
- Improving mobile coverage for remote communities should be part of future programs.
- Mobile phones should be recognised as a standard telephone service for many remote Indigenous Australians, and as such a safeguard similar to the extended zones strategy should be considered.

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[1] Indigenous Remote Media Association submission to 2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review, p12.

The findings and recommendations set out in this document should be considered by governments and industry as practical and appropriate measures for improving communications in remote Indigenous communities, and in particular, when considering the continuation and expansion of the ICP. To improve the digital literacy of remote Indigenous Australians, and give them the best chance of successfully participating in the digital economy, the government must engage communities and a range of relevant stakeholders to ensure services are delivered in the most practical and rewarding way.

Background

The social inclusion working group at the July 2012 B4BA forum (comprising IRCA General Manager Daniel Featherstone as convener, Apolline Kohen of Ninti One, Dr Ellie Rennie of Swinburne University and Neil Turner of PAKAM) identified '**Rethinking the Indigenous Communications Program (ICP)'** as a topic deserving further work.

Daniel subsequently prepared a summary document which listed several project areas that might be included in an enhanced ICP (see Attachment 1).

At a meeting between Daniel Featherstone (representing IRCA) and Ministerial Advisers to Senator Conroy Andrew Rodger and David Havyatt on 21st November, IRCA committed to developing an issues paper to present to DBCDE on the topic.

Further discussion

A teleconference was convened between Daniel Featherstone, Michael Charlton of ACCAN, and Andrew Crouch of CAT on December 8 to discuss this topic in greater detail. This paper summarises the issues arising from the discussion, and makes recommendations for changes to the program.

The existing Indigenous Communications Program

The ICP in its current form consists of three elements:

1. A provisioning and maintenance program for fixed satellite and terrestrial Community Phones;
2. A provisioning program for mobile satellite phone handsets for very small or transient communities[2]; and,
3. A provisioning and training program for Internet access in remote communities.

The existing Internet access model has been implemented through a multilateral agreement between the Commonwealth Government and the state and territory governments, called the Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (RIPIA) National Partnership Agreement. Each state/territory government has in turn selected one of its own agencies (often the state library) to deliver the program. Typically, designated communities receive about 3 computers, a broadband Internet connection (satellite, ADSL or 3G mobile), a WiFi hotspot, some additional hardware, and train the trainer and/or group training for a period of about 2 days per annum in the community.

Arising from the ICP, the Commonwealth has recently initiated field trials of community WiFi access to the Internet in 6 of the existing satellite Community Phone sites, based on modifications to the existing equipment.

The public internet access element of the program has been allocated a further $6.3 million in funding until 2014/2015 to maintain and monitor facilities established as part of the ICP and to provide further training at existing locations. However, there are currently no provisions for the identification of new communities or installation of new public internet facilities beyond mid-2013. The government response to recommendation 3.2 of the Regional Telecommunications Review highlights that under the ICP, approximately 3200 Indigenous Australians living in remote communities have received basic computer training through the establishment of 106 public internet facilities. Further, the DBCDE is conducting a trial of internet kiosks using the Interim Satellite Service in three remote Indigenous communities.

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[2] These two phone elements are administered through DBCDE and its private contractors.

Discussion about the existing ICP

The focus of this section is on the Internet Access element of the program.

Internet Access

Involvement of other parties in service delivery

The Internet access implementation plan guidelines allow for the engagement of local NGOs, but only under the conditions specified in the RIPIA inter-governmental agreements. These conditions stipulate a fixed list of communities as recipients (in the NT, 40 larger communities have been selected by the participating Governments), a largely fixed budget per community, and that the NGO operates as a sub-contractor or agent of the territory / state government.

Picking winners

The RIPIA plan does not allow for the funding to be selectively focussed on those communities that already have the ingredients in place to give the best chance of the funding being effective – for example existing Indigenous/community/NGO- or volunteer-run Internet access facilities in communities that may warrant the provision of a greater share of equipment or service funding. Other service providers that can offer support for Internet access include existing media, arts or youth programs – a community with a strong established program, even one that does not yet offer Internet access facilities for residents, has a considerably better prospect as the nucleus for building services for residents than one without. While each community is different, and recognising these differences is the key to successful and engaging ICT programs, picking winners will require the selection process* for funding to target such sustainability criteria as:

- Availability of suitable secure and dedicated building space
- Community commitment, based on existing community consultative structures
- Reliable power infrastructure
- Member(s) of the community willing to undertake the training required to operate the centre,

as essential pre-requisites.

An established track record on which to build further is also a strong pointer to longer term sustainability of the programs. This might be centred on one or more of the following:

- Existing social and other training programs in the community
- Availability of local Indigenous people who have the supervisory, technical support, or training skills and the interest to be able to deliver the service, and provide scope for job creation.
- Existing ICT / media / content production services for residents, and scope and plans for expansion

The concept could be extended further to encourage the replication of successful approaches, by enlisting the people involved in developing such successful models to help extend them to other locations with similar interests and requirements.

* The selection decision-making process should include Indigenous representation, including the involvement of community based Indigenous organisations

The ICP assumes that Internet access is provided in a centrally located shared community centre

No provision is made for home-based computing. The RIPIA WiFi hotspots are short range and tend to target mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops) in the vicinity of the Internet centre.

Another implementation model that is intermediate between the Internet centre and home internet models is a more pervasive WiFi model that would enable connectivity throughout the community for WiFi enabled devices.

VoIP enabled devices could also use such services (whether home based, hotspot or pervasive) to make phone calls. If this approach is to be used on a broad scale, the speed and capacity of the external data link from the community to the Internet would need to be dimensioned accordingly, since these 'smart' devices incorporate both voice and data capabilities. Testing and trials would be required to determine its effectiveness and the limitations on the number of users and call quality. With each of these models, alternative approaches for billing options, account sharing etc. should be explored.

Recurrent funding

RIPIA includes relatively little funding for ongoing delivery of community based services, although as noted above, funding for maintenance and monitoring of the facilities and training has been allocated through to 2014/15. Past programs of this type from Networking the Nation, through TAPRIC and Backing Indigenous Ability have also been constructed primarily on a similar capital /up front funding model with relatively little ongoing operational funding. As a result, sustainability of the various initiatives over the longer term has been very limited; RIPIA is subject to the same risk. The underlying motive seems to have been to encourage the recipient communities to commit resources of their own to sustain the services. An alternative which appears not to have been tried is to offer part capital funding and part operational funding, as a means of attracting real engagement and commitment by the community from the outset.

Scope for applying other models

Other related and existing Internet access service delivery models include:

- Some Remote Indigenous Media Organisations and other Indigenous organisations already supply services similar to RIPIA, and have their own technical support resources. Augmenting Internet access funding for these organisations could be an alternative that would also serve to consolidate their own existing activities
- The concept of a regional or sub-regional service provider of support and maintenance services. The existing RIPIA model is constructed on a state-wide basis, but in some cases a smaller scale local/regional model may be more effective. This would enable the program to link within existing regional planning and coordination models and potentially collocate with existing programs, services and facility usage.
- The NBN Digital Hubs program. Conceptually, RIPIA and the Digital Hubs are similarly motivated. The objective in each case is to encourage digital inclusion through the provision of a place for people to learn what the Internet can offer them, to receive training in the use of computer applications, and to obtain access to the Internet to conduct their personal business. However, the current focus of the Hubs program is limited to the NBN early release fibre sites, so its scope would need to be broadened to include regions where the wireless and satellite modes of access are necessary. The scale of funding is also different. Typically a RIPIA site receives about $6000 in equipment funding and a similar amount in training funding each year, while Digital Hubs recipients each receive about $350,000 in total, and there are only 32 of them in total across Australia. A hybrid model may be appropriate in some situations, and could potentially include a transportable outreach facility to reach people who live too far from a major centre to consider utilising an existing Hub site. (see also Attachment 2 – letter from CAT on behalf of B4BA to David Havyatt)
- The WA Government's Community Resource Centre (formerly Telecentre) network is a good model for community access ICT facilities, with community management and ongoing supplementary funding.

Specific features

The services provided should be gender and age inclusive. People use the computer and the Internet for different purposes, and good design demands that the environment is comfortable for all potential users. In some circumstances, this may mean that discrete locations are needed for men and women, and/or older people.

Charges

Where public funding is provided to operate Internet centre facilities, the charges to users of the service should be kept to a level commensurate with their ability to pay.

Appropriate training delivery models

Similarly training delivery should recognise gender-based delivery, the high levels of people with English as second language and low literacy. Continuity of training is critical for people who have had little or no previous IT experience, as is ongoing access to computers to continue self-paced or peer-supported learning through regular usage. A recurrent training program is required to embed and build on skills, if remote indigenous people are to effectively benefit from the social and economic development opportunities of digital literacy. One-off training courses have very little sustained impact.

Training as empowerment

Proper and ongoing training is critical to improving digital literacy in remote Indigenous communities. Professional training, in both ICT use and maintenance, as a way to make programs more sustainable and community based should be seen as a community development project. Funding should be directed at training local people to run community internet centres, with trainees being employed through the funding to provide supervision and IT support at the centre. This type of funding should be directed at communities and community organisations where there are facilities and infrastructure in place to run a successful public internet site.

If funding was available to communities, through application by individual or community organisation, who were able to house a public internet site, and had community members keen to take part in training and support roles, the money could be directed at buying the computers and internet subscription, and providing the training and full wages for trained staff. Under the RIPIA, the NT received a little over $750,000 in 2010-11, and just under $700,000 in 2011-12. Spread equally over 40 communities under the current RIPIA strategy, this amounts to about $18,000 per annum per community. The sustainable model would require an order of magnitude higher funding.   This may mean there is only funding for say three or four additional communities per state per year, but if the funding was ongoing, many communities could be reached over time. If these kinds of figures were to continue into the future a model like this seems very achievable, with money left to maintain and build on established facilities in other communities.

This kind of model has the potential to create jobs, provide the communities with a greater sense of ownership and responsibility, as well as ensure the centre remains operational and people have a go to point for technical issues and ongoing training. Continued funding could be dependent on the success of the first year (or two), with people having to apply by way of explaining these successes (with sufficient and appropriate help). By engaging community members in the application process for funding, additional training would occur, and more importantly give people a sense of achievement when funding is granted again.

Funding should reflect the need to empower community controlled organisations so that they are in the position to run their own public internet centres, and provide ongoing training and support from within the community. Enhancing these organisations to improve their business and governance processes through the use of ICT and supported training is a natural extension of this process.

Programs that just supply equipment and maintenance effectively disempower Aboriginal people and communities. The remoteness of communities means technical support may take days to arrive,

in which time interest is lost and learning forgotten. Training should include the technical side of ICT, so that local Indigenous staff can troubleshoot, and where appropriate address problems themselves without total reliance on external expertise.

Complementing ICP with other initiatives

Mobile coverage

Despite the fact that the 2008 and 2011/12 Regional Telecommunications Reviews (RTRs) both rated mobile coverage the number one issue, the ICP and indeed other Commonwealth Government programs do not currently include any funding for improving or extending mobile coverage in remote areas. The last significant program of this type was completed in 2007.

 A dominant reason for this is the Government's policy and philosophical position that it is a matter for the market and not for more public money. That is difficult to argue against other than at a high political level.   In addition, and as was pointed out during the B4B forum, the restriction of the NBN charter specifically to fixed broadband services also currently serves to keep remote-region cellular mobile and its associated backhaul system requirements off political agendas. This may be a policy matter for B4BA to consider in the leadup to the next federal election.

Another reason is that the RTR has argued that cellular mobile coverage footprints have largely reached the commercial viability limits. There seems to be good evidence for that, but alternative options including new technology that may extend the viability limits include: -

- Opportunities for employing satellite backhaul systems for remote mobile base stations may have been overlooked, even though (i) they are being employed overseas as economically attractive alternatives to fibre; and (ii) both Telstra and Optus refer to using the technology in their respective 2011/2012 RTR submissions (Telstra for Birdsville. Optus for Birdsville and in future elsewhere).
- Micro-cell mobile base station equipment, with costs typically an order of magnitude lower than conventional macro-cell types, could suit the requirements of some small remote communities and some remote station homesteads.
- Opportunities for supplementing appropriate parts of the extensive remote-region HCRC tower network with modern medium capacity microwave radio systems for mobile backhaul and as base station towers within some communities. The CSIRO Ngara technology may also have a place here.

 Although satellite and microwave backhaul for cellular mobile in remote areas appear attractive and warrant serious consideration, for the Alliance itself to identify a likely effective approach and pursue it can be expected to require appreciable investigation and discussion. These are also options that are technically and commercially accessible to the carriers so it might be expected that they would consider these as a matter of course.

The third option of upgrading at least parts of the existing Telstra HCRC network for remote area mobile coverage was not raised by RTR, is not in itself likely to be in Telstra's commercial interest to publicise, but may get some specific attention if the Alliance makes an approach to the Government.

The Government's current formal position on the mobile coverage matter in response to RTR is that it will "review the impact of the NBN fixed wireless network on improving mobile coverage in regional areas before making any commitments to fund a new program to extend mobile coverage" (Government's response to RTR rec 3.2).   In reality, NBN coverage maps show that the impact of the NBN fixed wireless network on remote areas will be negligible. It may have a small impact in regional areas. In contrast however, the existing network of Telstra HCRC towers provides

comprehensive terrestrial telephone coverage over the outback, and thus could have a significant impact. It has the following characteristics:

- The existing HCRC mechanical/electrical infrastructure assets (tower and associated power supply infrastructure - mix of solar photo voltaic and other sources) are largely sound, although the electrical capacity would need to be expanded to carry additional loads. The radio path designs undertaken for its development and deployment could be adapted for other microwave technologies.
- Continues to provide almost all telephone connections in remote Indigenous Communities and pastoral stations (a total of 9,000 customers), so is well located
- Uses older microwave technology for backhaul transmission between towers which is not compatible with NBN or mobile use, and would be regarded by Telstra themselves as obsolescent, and not a strategic commercial asset for them.

 Building on HCRC's specific characteristics, the tower infrastructure could be used to support other microwave borne services. Microwave could be an alternative backhaul option for extended mobile coverage, as low cost, medium capacity microwave technology may prove cost effective against other options such as satellite mobile backhaul, when the largely sunk cost of the towers is taken into account.

The Government might be amenable to a suggestion from B4BA that their review announced in response to RTR noted above be extended to include "review the impact of the existing HCRC tower network on improving mobile coverage in remote areas…"

Mobile call tariffing

The Government funded the 'extended zones' tariffing plan in 2001 to provide STD calls at local call rates for fixed line telephone callers in remote telephone zones, to counteract the Tyranny of Distance.

The low take-up of fixed-line phone services in remote Indigenous communities, being approximately 20 per cent in 2007,[3] means this $150 million extended zone agreement between the Commonwealth and Telstra has been marginally beneficial to Indigenous Australians. Importantly, the high take-up of mobile phones in remote Indigenous communities means that the extended zones strategy is further losing its effectiveness, and has prompted the need to recognise this form of communication as a standard telephone service for remote Indigenous Australians, requiring a Universal Service Obligation (USO) initiative similar, or complementary to, the extended zones strategy.

A report on Mobile Technology in Wujal Wujal in the Bloomfield River Valley region of Cape York points out that lack of access, prohibitive connection costs, maintenance difficulties, and cultural obligations associated with having a fixed-line service, all contribute to the low take-up of fixed-line services.[4] As a result of the low take-up, and the obvious need to communicate, mobile phones, particularly pre-paid, have increasingly become the preferred option of communication for Indigenous people living in remote areas.

Key findings from a report on mobile phone use among Aboriginal people in central Australia suggests that mobile phones are providing basic telecommunications access for those with limited home phone access, and further, that mobile phones provide a standard phone service for a

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[3] ACMA 2008, Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities p27. Note also that many fixed line phones in remote communities are associated with institutional users such as clinics, schools, police stations and local government offices, so the percentage representing residents will be lower again than this figure.
[4] Report to Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council on Mobile Technology in the Bloomfield River Valley, p 13.

particularly mobile population.[5] With mobile phones being the preferred option of communication among remote Indigenous populations, and the need to stay in contact with friends and family on a regular basis, the high costs of calls naturally becomes an issue for many users.

Indigenous Australians in remote areas often have extremely low incomes, with many people relying on Centrelink benefits to meet their basic needs. Mobile phone use by Aboriginal people on low incomes in central Australia indicates that many people are spending a high proportion of their income on mobile phones, and that many people simply did not own a mobile phone due to the costs associated with ownership.[6] While low income Australians who have a fixed-line service in their home have access to discounted service packages, and those with a fixed-line in the extended zones benefit from capped calls, there is no equivalent for low income mobile users who rely on their mobile phone as their standard telephone. This presents a major equity issue.

If we look at the comparison between fixed-line and mobile phone charges tabled in the Wujal Wujal report, we see that mobile phone users pay a disproportionate amount to stay connected to friends and family compared to those staying in contact via a fixed-line service. The comparison shows that if you were to make three five minute local calls from a fixed-line each day for a month, you would in incur costs of $47.95. If you were to make the same calls from a prepaid mobile phone you would be expected to pay about $380.[7] For people on low incomes who rely on prepaid mobile phones as their standard mode of communication, the costs associated with keeping in touch with family and friends on a regular basis has a detrimental impact on very limited disposable income.

For Indigenous people living in remote areas, mobile phones are becoming an essential form of communication. For a number of reasons, fixed-line services are underutilised by remote Indigenous communities, with indications this trend will continue into the future. For instance, in Wujal Wujal in far north Queensland, private listings have dropped by 50 per cent in the 2006/2009 period, coinciding with the introduction of Telstra's Next G network.[8] What is evident from reports on mobile use in both central Australia and far north Queensland is Indigenous people in remote areas are increasingly relying on mobile phones as their standard communications device, and that there is a need to address the high charges people face keeping in contact with friends and family.

To improve communications services for remote indigenous Australia, it would be appropriate for the Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency (TUSMA), in conjunction with the Commonwealth and service providers, to introduce a scheme whereby remote residents who rely on a mobile phone as their primary communication tool are protected by a 'vulnerable consumer' safeguard. To be of most benefit to the remote Indigenous population around Australia, the scheme would ideally see calls from eligible mobile phones in extended zones capped at a local or comparable rate, as a technology-neutral complement to the existing extended zone tariff. This would ensure that people living on low incomes, who rely on their mobile phone as their main communications device, are afforded reasonable access on an equitable basis to a standard telephone service.[9]

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[5] Ingerrekenhe Antirrkweme, Mobile Phone Use Among Low Income Aboriginal People: A Central Australian Snapshot, p7.

[6] Ingerrekenhe Antirrkweme, Mobile Phone Use Among Low Income Aboriginal People: A Central Australian Snapshot

[7] Mobile Technology in the Bloomfield River Valley, p33

[8] Mobile Technology in the Bloomfield River Valley, p19.

[9] See policy objectives in part two (public interest telecommunications services) of Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency Bill 2011.

Application and content programs

ICP is a provisioning and training program. As such it does not provide funding for application development.

Relevant and user-friendly applications and content are the key to effective uptake of ICTs by remote Indigenous people. Internet banking is a relevant application that promotes financial management and demonstrates how services can be accessed on-line. Social networking sites and media production and delivery applications (e.g.- iTunes, iPhoto, YouTube, Indigitube) are particularly effective in engaging new users, as are community archive programs (e.g. Ara Irititja Archival project). It is particularly important to ensure there is content to support language maintenance and that is culturally relevant and appropriate to remote users. As with BIA and TAPRIC, a program element for on-line content and applications development should be part of a revised ICP. Web development and digital content development training has potential for job creation and business opportunities, especially in the cultural sector, which extend beyond its value for archival & cultural maintenance purposes.

To reduce the risk of organisations being over-charged for web development, organisations could be offered web development training workshops using free software (e.g.- Wordpress, Wikispace, Joomla) or support from a community-focussed organisation (e.g. Connecting Up) to choose appropriate CMS templates and develop content. Similarly, proven software for community managed archives, such as the Ara Irititja, could be made available to communities (as per the NT libraries Community Stories project), enabling them to collate and access local and repatriated audio-visual content, and for users to add meta-data and build a social history repository.

Recommendations

Internet access

1. ICP Internet access centre funding should be selectively focussed on those communities that already have the ingredients in place to give the best chance of the funding being effective. The selection process should target such sustainability criteria as:
   - Availability of suitable secure and dedicated building space
   - Community commitment, based on existing community consultative structures
   - Reliable power infrastructure
   - Member(s) of the community willing to undertake the training required to operate the centre,

   as essential pre-requisites. An established track record on which to build further is also a strong pointer to longer term sustainability of the programs.

2. The ICP implementation model for Internet access funding should be extended to embrace other models beyond the traditional Internet access centre approach. This could include both home access, and mobile access throughout the community. An integral part of this extension should be the inclusion of alternative approaches for billing, account sharing etc. with the objective of encouraging take-up.

3. ICP Internet access funding should take account of the ongoing costs to sustain such initiatives, by putting a greater emphasis on operational funding.

4. ICP Internet access funding for training, support and maintenance could be structured where appropriate on the basis of a regional or sub-regional service provider model.

5. ICP Internet access funding should recognise the importance of regularly recurring training. Funding should also be actively targeted at training local people to undertake training (of other community members) and facility support.

Mobile coverage

6. The Commonwealth Government should continue to provide funding to improve both fixed and mobile telecommunications services, including but not restricted to Internet access. On the mobile side, improved coverage should be a priority.

7. The Government should add a term of reference to their current review into the value of using NBN wireless towers to extend mobile coverage. This reference would expand the review to consider the value of using the existing HCRC network towers to extend mobile coverage in remote areas.

8. In light of the reducing effectiveness of the extended charging zones tariffing measure in containing communications costs for Indigenous and other residents of remote areas, the Government should consider an equivalent tariffing strategy to subsidise mobile calls made from remote areas.

Application and content programs

9. A program element for on-line content and applications development should be part of a revised ICP.

Attachment 1

Rethinking the Indigenous Communications Program

Initial project summary (IRCA)

This project seeks to represent the views and experience of remote communities and stakeholder organizations in talking with government about extending the scope and accessibility of DBCDE's Indigenous Communications Program.

The aim is to enable digital inclusion for remote Indigenous communities through the design and delivery of appropriate communications programs, and learning from the lessons of previous programs (NTN, TAPRIC, BIA, and ICP). This project builds on Recommendations 2.6 and 5.2 of the Sinclair Review.

Some of the proposed projects identified by the BB4B Social inclusion group for consideration under an extended ICP include:

- Compare the scope of the ICP with mainstream programs such as Digital Hubs and Digital Enterprise to ensure remote communities have access to relevant programs and funding;

- Extend access of ICP beyond State/territory government to NGOs, remote media organizations and other appropriate providers;

- Continuation of training, IT support and on-line content programs (building on best-practice models developed under TAPRIC, BIA and ICP);

- Rollout of access facilities and Wi-Fi hotspots in communities, collocated with existing community-managed facilities where applicable;

- Trial of IP mobile telephony (via satellite or wireless backhaul);

- Extension of Ara Irititja archival project software as a standard model for community based social history. I look forward to hearing your suggestions of other projects, your experience and feedback on the ICP and further discussion to progress this project.