



*Remote, Connected and Savvy!*  
*Forum VI*  
**COMMUNIQUE**

Delegates at the sixth annual Forum of the Broadband for the Bush Alliance held in Fremantle from June 21-23 identified improving availability and affordability of telecommunication (voice and data) services, setting minimum service standards and guarantees, advancing digital literacy and empowerment remain key priorities to stop the digital divide widening between the bush and metropolitan areas. An Indigenous Focus Day, focussing on Indigenous communities' telecommunication issues was held immediately prior to the Forum, the output of that day is incorporated into this communiqué.

The Forum renewed its call for the development and adoption of a ***Remote Telecommunications Strategy*** that identifies the unique characteristics faced by rural and remote residents and businesses. Without a focused outcome based ***strategy*** to drive policy and inform those not attuned to rural and remote realities a one-size-fits-all digital infrastructure and digital engagement framework will not deliver any value.

The Forum called for development of an ***Indigenous Digital Inclusion*** Index be adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as a key performance measure within the Closing the Gap Framework.

The Forum also called for an ***Indigenous Digital Inclusion Program*** to address the opportunities provided by Internet access, including access to jobs sites, educational resources, online learning, online government services, online banking, and the potential for engaging with the digital economy through establishing online businesses.

The Forum brought together decision makers and representatives from across regional and remote Australia, including residents, community groups, public and private sector organisations, technical experts and various parties with an interest in remote communications and services.

Speakers across the four forum streams - *Digital inclusion in the bush*, *Regional innovation*, *Policy and regulation* and *Technology in action* - shared their experiences and projects; provided important updates on technology developments and latest policy developments. Keynote presentations included an address by Delia Richard from the ACCC on their work and recommendation on mobile roaming; an update from NBN Co by Gavin Williams; a presentation from Tim Kelsey on the Digital Health Strategy for Australia and a presentation by Professor Hugh Bradlow on how new technologies are about to radically change our society and lives.

## Our Thanks

We acknowledge the Forum Ambassador Brad Howarth who moderated the event and provided guidance to the Forum Committee. We also acknowledge the leadership of the Forum Committee in organising the Event. The members of the Forum Committee chaired by Apolline Kohen were: Brad Howarth, Brendan Fitzgerald, Penny Griffith, David Murtagh, Daniel Featherstone, Jeremy Riddle, Marianne St Clair and Rob Starling.

## Recommendations

In light of the Forum, the Broadband for the Bush Alliance makes the following recommendations regarding broadband policy and action for remote and regional Australia.

### Key policy recommendations:

- Development and implementation of a targeted remote telecommunications strategy.
- Indigenous Digital Inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to be added as a Closing the Gap key performance measure by COAG.
- Expand mobile coverage in remote Australia via a Mobile Black Spots program specifically targeted at remote Australia where current commercial business models fail.
- Long-term Infrastructure Planning to expand terrestrial network coverage to address congestion in the NBN satellite footprint and service outages in monsoonal Northern Australia, including via wireless and shared infrastructure models.
- Increased data allocation for all SkyMuster services, including business-grade managed services and Public Internet Premises product.
- Improve MyGov and other government online services and reporting methods to be more user-friendly and accessible for people with limited digital and English literacy.
- Unmetered access to online government services and other essential services.
- Re-instate the Digital Hubs, Digital Enterprise and Digital Local Government programs.
- Support shires/regions to develop Digital Development Plans to address local needs, maximise engagement and promote social, cultural and economic development.
- Increased Medicare item numbers to be available for Telehealth including for GP and allied health professional consultations.
- Savings made in Patient Assisted Travel by implementing telehealth be passed on to the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation responsible for coordinating patient care using telehealth consultations.

### Research:

- Expand the data collection for the Digital Inclusion Index to include remote and Indigenous Australia and the development of a Social Capital metric.
- Improved data collection is needed to measure digital inclusion in remote and rural Australia including Indigenous communities.
- Broadband monitoring by ACCC to include satellite and fixed wireless.
- Cost-benefit analysis of providing affordable internet and digital literacy into remote Australia, with social and economic development opportunities, cost savings, reduced carbon footprint and improved outcomes in government service delivery, telehealth, online education, agriculture, tourism and community well-being.
- Research into payphone use in remote communities before the Productivity Commission recommendation to remove payphones from the USO is implemented.

### Improving digital access and engagement:

- Homes that do not have access to mobile services should be provided with internet access through technologies such as LTE and WiFi.
- Need for more staffed learning centres or community hubs in remote towns and communities to provide access facilities, digital literacy and support.
- An ongoing IT training and Digital Mentors support program, flexible to local needs and locally relevant strategies.
- Knowledge sharing and learning resources to enable greater reach and impact.

### Indigenous specific recommendations (not outlined above):

- A dedicated Indigenous Digital Inclusion Index and Strategy is needed to improve Closing the Gap measures and provide pathways towards engagement in the national digital economy and society.
- IT Training and Technical Support Program (ongoing).
- Digital Mentors Employment Program.
- Remote Cyber Safety Strategy and delivery programs.
- Funding for locally managed media servers to enable affordable access to cached local media, education resources, archives, language and cultural content via WiFi.
- Maintain existing telephony services in remote communities where no mobile coverage exists, including payphones.
- More affordable pre-paid mobile data products needed.
- Industry partnerships for infrastructure access and internet sharing via RAPs/ILUAs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on Boards/advisory groups and engagement in decision making affecting their communities.

## About the Broadband for the Bush Forum VI

The sixth Broadband for the Bush Forum: Remote, Connected and Savvy! Took place in Fremantle on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2017.

The Forum offered a unique opportunity to give voice to residents of remote and regional Australia, examining the challenges they face stemming from poor access to digital infrastructure (voice, data and mobile). The possibilities for educated digitally literate remote Australians through digital inclusion in terms of economic participation, social advancement and community sustainability were explored and highlighted.

Presenters delivered a diverse range of firsthand accounts of digital adoption and empowerment and examples of the consequences of exclusion. Across the two-days, the Forum focused on four themes to enable businesses and communities to grow and prosper in the global digital economy. The four Forum themes were: Digital inclusion in the bush, regional innovation, policy and regulations and technology in action.

The Forum program emphasised the role of broadband communications as a critical enabler for better digital literacy, innovation and economic empowerment for rural and remote Australia.

The Forum was attended by over 150 delegates, and featured presentations from government, academia, Indigenous groups, research organisations, telecommunications companies, technology innovators, not-for-profit organisations and the broader commercial sector.

## Contact

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## Appendix 1: Broadband for the Bush Forum VI 2017 Sponsors

A special mention to our sponsors, without whom the annual Broadband for the Bush Forum would not be possible. The Forum is the only national annual conference dedicated to exploring and highlighting digital issues affecting rural and remote Australians. The Alliance, a member organisation, faces financial challenges to stage the event and sincerely acknowledges the generous contribution of our sponsors in supporting rural and remote regions.

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## Appendix 2: Broadband for the Bush Forum VI 2017 – Materials

All Broadband for the Bush Forum VI materials can be downloaded here:

<http://broadbandforthebush.com.au/2017-forum>

Including:

- Full program.
- Photos.
- Presentations.
- Media releases.