

MEDIA RELEASE

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Unlocking the Digital Potential of the Bush

Remote Australia remains largely disconnected from the digital revolution. What most Australians take for granted, remote and rural Australians forego: delivery of government and health services, access to education resources and economic development opportunities. The digital exclusion of remote Australians will inevitably contribute to widening inequalities between remote and non-remote Australians if we do not act now.

“We aim to ensure that remote and rural Australia does not become further disadvantaged in the area of communications. We believe that a targeted, evidence-based, well-resourced strategy is required for remote and rural Australia to participate successfully in the national and global digital economy,” says Ray Heffernan, Chair of the Broadband for the Bush Alliance. “We do this by educating stakeholders on the digital challenges faced in the bush and publishing remote digital policies supported by research.”

The Broadband for the Bush Alliance is a membership-based organisation dedicated to advancing the digital capacity and capability for those who work and live in remote Australia.

The Alliance is hosting the fourth Forum Unlocking the Digital Potential of the Bush on Wednesday 15 and Thursday 16 July 2015 in Darwin.

According to Mr Heffernan, “Better communications infrastructure underpins access to fixed and mobile services and can facilitate metropolitan-equivalent choices for people in remote regions. In a global society, digital equivalence is necessary so people can effectively participate in the online environment.”

Apolline Kohen, Chair of the Forum Committee, says, “This two-day dynamic program will enable the active engagement of remote and rural stakeholders with key decision-makers to build collaboration and deliver the best possible policy outcomes. We will see panel discussions and presentations about local connected communities, strong and sustainable economy, breakthrough innovations and technology, and engaged government.”

Brad Howarth is this year’s Forum Moderator. Representatives from the NBN Co, Telstra, Optus, and state and federal government will be attending. Speakers include:

- Matthew Perault, Head of Global Policy Development at Facebook and Internet.org presenting on connecting the unconnected
- The Hon Michael McCormack MP will be representing the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development
- Teresa Corbin, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, will present on the future of the Universal Service Obligation
- Joe Morrison, Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Land Council speaking to land rights and future economies.

The day preceding the Forum, Tuesday 14 July 2015, is the Broadband for the Bush Indigenous Focus Day. This is a gathering of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who will explore the opportunities of appropriate digital access and the challenges of connectivity in the bush.

“It is a dedicated event for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in the Top End and central Australia who have most to gain from digital inclusion. It is an opportunity for them to describe projects from their communities in the use of broadband and telephony applications and to share experiences of positive change as well as challenges and pitfalls,” explains Daniel Featherstone, General Manager of the Indigenous Remote Communication Association, a founding member organisation of the Alliance.

Registrations for the Forum closed weeks prior to the event, due to full capacity. The Forum Principal Sponsor, Charles Darwin University, has offered an additional 200 participants the opportunity to join remotely using Cisco WebEx meetings.

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