

Opening remarks B4BA Forum – Remote Connected and Savvy!

23 June 2016

- Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, past and present, of the land we're meeting on today, the Noongar people.
- I also acknowledge our young and our emerging leaders as they are our future.
- Remote, Connected and Savvy ! is Broadband for the Bush sixth forum and it is pleasing to see both familiar and new faces today.
- On behalf of the Broadband for the Bush Alliance Board, I welcome all of you and thank you for joining us to actively participate in our annual forum. I know that some of you have travelled thousands of kilometres from very remote communities to be here. So thank you.
- For the next two days, we will explore through our four forum themes, innovative solutions, community projects and new technology developments which are improving digital inclusion in regional, rural and remote areas.
- It will also be an opportunity to discuss policy directions and continue to make our own recommendations.
- Last year, at the end of our Forum in Brisbane, forum participants concluded that improving availability and affordability of services, setting minimum service standards and guarantees, advancing digital literacy and empowerment remained key priorities to bridge the digital divide between the bush and metropolitan areas.
- A year later, I think it is fair to say that these priorities are ongoing and much more work and investments will be required in years to come to achieve major change.

- We need to continue to work at community levels and share our experiences and learnings but, ultimately, a shift in government policies and programs as well as targeted investments will be paramount to achieve significant progress.
- I see our forums as an opportunity for remote stakeholders to learn from each other to improve outcomes in their communities and build a community of practice.
- It is also an opportunity to unite our voices to call for new targeted policies for rural and remote Australia.
- I talked last year about the difficult challenge for remote Australia to have a voice which can influence policy, funding and programs as only 3% of the Australian population live in remote Australia but it covers over 85% of the Australian landmass.
- There is no vote to be gained to invest in remote Australia and ultimately, most of Australia is not interested
- The challenge remains but new stakeholders have joined to call for better communications in the bush.
- Over the past 12 months, the Broadband for the Bush Alliance has joined the Regional, Rural and Remote Coalition led by the National Farmers Federation and ACCAN to undertake a major campaign to raise awareness of the important role of connectivity in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- In March, B4BA along with the other 16 members of the Coalition met over 50 parliamentarians from all sides of politics with the aim of highlighting the challenges and opportunities of telecommunications in the bush. During the 2 days, we called on the Government to commit to 5 actions, which align with recommendations made at our previous forums:
 - A universal service obligation (USO) that is technology neutral and provides access to both voice and data
 - Customer service guarantee to deliver more accountability from providers and nbn

- Long term public funding for open access mobile network expansion in regional, rural and remote Australia (blackspots)
 - Fair and equitable access to Sky Muster satellite for those with genuine need for the service, and access which reflects the residential, educational and business needs of rural and remote Australia
 - Funding to build digital literacy and provide problem solving support for regional, rural and remote businesses and consumers.
- ‘We hear you and we want to help’ was the majority message from politicians.
 - We will have the opportunity to hear tomorrow morning an update about the Coalition activities.
 - I think our work is to collectively continue to bring forward solutions to these politicians.
 - However, I put to you that maybe the role of B4BA should be on how can we spread our learnings, replicate successes and grow our community of practice
 - This is why we have scheduled on Day 2 an interactive session where I suggest we explore how we can build solutions, replicate successes and make recommendations that will drive change.
 - After the forum, we will discuss with our members how to best continue this work.
 - I invite you to join this conversation and become an active participant. We can’t do it on our own.
 - To grow our influence, the Broadband for the Bush Alliance needs more resources and to continue to grow its membership. I thank all the new organisations and individuals who have joined the Alliance over the past 12 months.
 - So don’t hesitate, become a member of the Alliance. You can join as an organisation or an individual.
 - There are lots of ways you can support our efforts and they are not necessarily just through financial contributions.

- Your time, your research, your knowledge, your expertise; your network can help too. These are extremely valuable contributions for a movement like us.
- Now I will focus for a few minutes on the themes of the Forum and what we have tried to achieve with our 2017 program.
- We want this forum to capture the diversity of your experiences, the practical solutions you have developed, and the opportunities you see for rural and remote Australia.
- And I thank all the people who have responded to our call and offered to present at this forum through presentations, panel discussions, workshops and displays.
- From academics to professionals, researchers to users, public servants to policy makers, heads of small and large businesses, we thank you all for your contribution.
- This forum is yours and you will make it a success.
- We've designed the forum to be as interactive as possible and I encourage all of you to participate and speak up.
- I also encourage you to use social media – let make sure we trend on twitter by the end of today! #bushbroadband
- We have a full and engaging program with four streams:
- Digital inclusion in the bush where we will explore best practice models to facilitate digital inclusion across rural and regional Australia. We will hear from organisations and individuals who are engaged in amazing projects to improve access and digital capacity in some of the most remote places in WA, Arnhem Land and Far North Queensland. It will also be an opportunity to revisit the digital inclusion index. We will also hear about the establishment of the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance.
- The Regional innovation stream will look at examples of digital innovation across different sectors of the economy, for example in Agriculture and tele health. We will also hear practical examples about how to run online businesses in remote communities.

- The Technology in action stream will explore some of the latest and emerging technologies for connecting people in rural and remote areas. For example, there will be a dedicated session on emergency services and how the ability to access real time information is saving lives and resources.
- Our fourth stream will be around policy and regulations to discuss recent policy reviews, including the Productivity Commission review of the USO.
- And, I am sure you are looking forward to hear Delia Richard, the Deputy Chair of the ACCC a little later this morning talking about the ACCC draft recommendation on mobile roaming and the ACCC's telecommunications market study.
- Please look at your program, there are lots of sessions and activities to choose from. As you won't be able to attend all of them, we have asked our speakers to make their presentations available. So we will publish them on our website. This will give you an opportunity to revisit or discover some of the presentations at a later date. We had our Indigenous Focus Day with 80 participants from remote communities yesterday and you will hear later this morning Christine Ross who will give a summary of their discussions.
- We are here to give rural and remote Australians a voice and develop solutions together.
- I believe this Forum will provide this very much needed platform and I thank all the speakers who have agreed to come and participate.
- Before I finish, I would like to acknowledge our forum sponsors: our principal sponsor the Government of Western Australia through the Department of Commerce, Labour relations and Industry development. Without them ,we could not have organised this forum in Western Australia so thank you, our silver sponsors CSIRO and Telstra, our bronze sponsors Active8me, Desert Knowledge Australia, encapto wifi, Facebook, Infoxchange, Ursys, Optus and Vodafone.

- I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Northern Institute and Charles Darwin University.
- Also this year, we are grateful for the support of lotterywest, which has sponsored the travel and attendance of 21 forum participants from across Western Australia. Thank you.
- Also, I would like to thank all our Alliance members for their support, especially IRCA and AMSANT for their generous in-kind support
- We could not have organised the forum without your support. So thank you
- I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Forum committee: Brad Howarth, Brendan Fitzgerald, Daniel Featherstone, David Murtagh, Penny Griffith, Jeremy Riddle, Rob Starling and Marianne Saint-Clair. Without them, there would simply be no forum. So thank you again for your time. I also thank our forum coordinators Paul and Michelle.
- I would also like to thank our Forum ambassador, Brad Howarth – This is now Brad's fourth forum as an Ambassador and moderator. He has done an amazing job every year and I thank him for his generous support.
- Finally a big thank to my fellow Board members, Daniel Featherstone, David Murtagh, Rob Starling and Brendan Fitzgerald who generously give their time and expertise to ensure the Alliance continue its work towards a digitally connected and empowered remote and rural Australia. Don't hesitate to talk to them or myself during the next two days about opportunities, ideas, projects that may be of interest to the Alliance.
- I wish you all a very stimulating, thought provoking and fun forum.
- Thank you

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 Chair, Forum Committee
 Broadband for the Bush Alliance