

Collaboration to enhance research into remote Indigenous communities

As part of its role in monitoring of the delivery of telecommunications services to people living in remote Indigenous communities, ACMA recently visited industry, government and research organisations in Darwin and Alice Springs to enhance mutual understanding, particularly of research and data holdings.

The first visit was to the Telstra National Indigenous Directorate in Darwin, which was established in July 2005 to coordinate improvements to telecommunications services for remote Indigenous communities. It delivers services through programs such as the Community Phones Program, administered by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), and broadband infrastructure projects. The directorate also provides Indigenous training opportunities and is involved in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. At the meeting, data was identified that could be shared or exchanged to enhance ACMA's research program and inform Telstra's service delivery.

In Alice Springs, ACMA representatives visited the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK-CRC), which coordinates research activities in desert regions into topics such as desert industries, technologies and services. DK-CRC has a significant ongoing research program funded by various government bodies and private organisations and invited ACMA to suggest topics and questions that could be added to mobility surveys. One research program is Sparse Ad-hoc communications Networks for Desert, or SAND, which is developing wireless remote system mesh networks to enable inter-community communication services, such as VoIP, WiFi and mobile use, at low cost.

The final meeting in Alice Springs was with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory.

The association's activities include promoting access to the internet and email, and training communities to use them, through the NT Connect program.

Through these meetings, ACMA has established a basis for future collaboration on research into the availability, take-up and use of telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities. The meetings are part of a series of stakeholder contacts for an ACMA report that is expected to be released in late 2007. ACMA will visit Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory for a case study to be included in the report and liaises with DCITA, state government representatives and the ABS' National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics.

This research is part of a broader regional services research program aimed at establishing a bank of factual information to inform future telecommunications reviews, in particular the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, which is expected to convene during 2007–08.

Previous ACMA reports on telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For the public: Consumer & community advice > Services in regional areas).



LAWRIE MORTIMER, GENERAL MANAGER OF TELSTRA'S NATIONAL INDIGENOUS DIRECTORATE, DEMONSTRATES A COMMUNITY PHONE TO ACMA'S RENEE LUSTMAN



COMMUNITY PHONE IN THE BUSH