



Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review

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Introduction

Indigenous Community Television welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry. We support the submission to this Review of our partner organisation Indigenous Remote Communications Association with respect to the broader telecommunications needs of remote Indigenous Australia and, consequently, will not seek to respond directly to the questions in the Review paper.

Rather, our particular focus with this submission is to draw attention to the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of broadband access in remote Indigenous communities, particularly with regard to on-line delivery as an alternative to broadcast television services. ICTV is currently finding itself being wedged into that gap.

ICTV is strongly in favour of improved telecommunications being delivered into remote and regional Australia and welcomes the Government's initiative with the National Broadband Network to provide high-speed broadband to all Australians.

However, the ability to deliver high-bandwidth media and communications services to remote communities will be determined by the quality, affordability and accessibility of broadband services. We are concerned that the proposed satellite backhaul solution for remote Australia (at 12Mbps up, 1Mbps down peak speeds) will limit the types of applications available to remote Australians, in particular two-way real-time applications and IPTV. With respect to remote Indigenous communities, we are also concerned about the extent to which last-mile distribution of broadband is being considered as part of NBN planning.

We are also critically aware that, with digital switchover currently underway in remote Australia via a Direct-to Home (DTH) model, along with the abolition of community broadcasting and sharing capability by December 2013, there is an expectation within government that current Indigenous community broadcasting will be replaced by on-line delivery. The assumptions underlying this have not been tested.

Stevens Review 2010

The recent *Review of Australian Government investment in the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector* (2010), chaired by Mr Neville Stevens, made the following recommendation in relation to Indigenous Community Television (ICTV):

Existing IBP funding to Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) and/or to another appropriate Indigenous broadcasting and media organisation be continued in order to support an online portal for sharing and accessing content made by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially in remote Australia, and to act as an aggregator for this content.

This recommendation recognises that, under current digital switchover planning, there is no solution for an accessible Indigenous community television service beyond December 2013 with the digital switchover to VAST. However, by proposing on-line delivery of the service as the only means of distribution, the Review fails to take into consideration several key factors relating to remote Indigenous communities and audiences:

- Lack of computers in Indigenous households,
- Lack of internet access to Indigenous households;
- Limited IT literacy;
- Lack of last-mile broadband distribution for most remote communities;

- Cost of downloading/ streaming media content to access TV services in low-income populations (whereas urban areas have free digital broadcast of community TV channels); and
- The nature of television viewing in remote communities (large audiences requiring large screen, often outside of a dwelling).

This recommendation also fails to recognise that ICTV, like other community-produced local-language Indigenous broadcasting, is a primary media service for remote indigenous people. The 16 channels of mainstream TV on VAST are the supplementary services.

All of these factors mean it is highly unlikely that Recommendation 19 of the Stevens Review, which proposes that ICTV could play a role "as a facilitator of the distribution of local programs to local communities via the NBN" (p.67) can be effectively implemented.

On-line delivery, as a sole platform, would severely limit the access to ICTV by its primary target audience. While an on-line portal site IndigiTUBE has already been established by ICTV and IRCA for sharing of remote media content, a dedicated free-to-air channel for ICTV is the only realistic option for reaching the majority of audience in remote communities. A similar model to what the Steven's Review recommends is available in remote Indigenous communities of Canada, however the last mile issue has been addressed via a cabled network throughout each community. At this point, we would prefer not to speculate on a time-frame for the takeup of internet services in remote Australian communities, based on a multitude of factors including government Policy, except to say that it could be many years.

ICTV urges the RTIRC to raise this issue with Minister Conroy and the Digital Switchover Taskforce, lest a significant Indigenous television service is lost because of a lack of awareness of the reality of remote Indigenous access to broadband.

Internet Access

Most remote Indigenous people currently have limited access and usage of ICTs, particularly within Indigenous households. According to the 2006 census, only 20% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in remote and very remote Australia had an Internet connection compared with 80% in the rest of the population, with only 10% of remote Indigenous children have access to Internet. In Central Australia the take-up of Internet in remote Indigenous households is even less at 2.2 %¹. These figures indicate that remote Indigenous people are currently not able to participate in the digital revolution or benefit directly from the NBN.

Most Internet access in remote communities is currently via workplaces, school/ TAFE, or shared access facilities and is limited to the opening hours of these facilities. This excludes access after hours, on weekends and during holiday periods- the primary viewing times for television.

ICTV sees the expansion of Internet access to remote Indigenous people as important, along with training and funding for appropriate content. However, it is not appropriate to assume that this access and uptake will be achieved within the time frame of the NBN rollout. Quite apart from the technical issues, there are still key issues of English literacy, cultural value concerns and relevance to be overcome. It is also not appropriate to see this as a primary delivery platform of Indigenous-specific services for many years to come.

¹ 'Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities' report (July 2011) - a research project being undertaken by ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the Central Land Council.

Digital TV Switchover

Under current planning for digital TV switchover, there is significant concern in remote communities that the Direct-to-Home (DTH) model of digital TV delivery will have a major impact on Indigenous languages and culture through the loss of localised Indigenous community broadcasting and ICTV.

Under the Digital Television Switchover, due for completion by the end of 2013, all remote communities are planned to be transferred to Satellite Direct-to Home (DTH) digital TV, providing 16 channels of mainstream television services via VAST (Viewer Access Satellite Television). With the current analog self-help transmission services being switched off, there are currently no plans in place to provide an alternative delivery model for community broadcasting, and the capacity for insertion of community-produced content in language, established under the BRACS program in the late 1980s. Also, Indigenous Community TV service will no longer be able to reach remote audiences via satellite without a dedicated channel on the VAST satellite.

If the current policy is implemented, Indigenous people will lose their primary TV services in exchange for a suite of mainstream English-language services, which have limited appeal and will further erode cultural and linguistic diversity and representation.

While the Satellite Subsidy Scheme (SSS) is planning to install satellite dishes in remote communities for free, ongoing maintenance costs are to be borne by the consumer. In remote communities, television viewing is often outside of a house and viewed by groups of people. The shift to DTH would limit television viewing to being inside a house and restrict to a single television access per household (unless additional outlets and set-top boxes are purchased- only one service is covered under SSS). People without houses or staying outside of the community (e.g.- in sorry camp) will no longer be able to access television.

By not allowing the pooling of the SSS subsidy, remote communities are effectively not being given the option to upgrade their analog self-help transmission services to digital. The transfer to DTH is already completed in northern Queensland with South Australia and NSW starting soon.

On-line Delivery of TV Services

Podcasting and on-line streaming are increasingly becoming the way specific-audience programming and view-on-demand media (like ABC's iView) are expected to reach their audience. However, this assumes that the audience are able to access these platforms, which is not the case for remote communities.

IRCA and ICTV have already set up an on-line platform for remote media called [IndigiTUBE](#), which showcases video content and radio broadcasts from remote communities. There are numerous other on-line media delivery platforms developed for Indigenous community access in Australia and around the world². Without high-speed broadband capacity and affordable access, viewing or participation in programs such as these is limited.

Recently ICTV upgraded the IndigiTUBE site to enable remote producers to upload new content directly from their communities. However, while this functionality is able to be used in those regions with fibre optic networks (APY and Ngaanyatjarra lands, Cape York, Yuendumu etc), it is not possible for producers in most of our constituent communities,

² These include: Sunchild Cyber School in Canada (www.sccyber.net) which provides an online interactive indigenous schooling platform leading to tertiary education; Inuit television and film (www.isuma.tv); Ngapartji Ngapartji online Pitjantjatjara language course and videos (www.ngapartji.org); Us Mob (www.abc.net.au/usmob); Deadly Mob; Ara Irititja Archival Project (going on-line soon) and many more.

where satellite internet services are very slow and regularly drop out (especially when transferring large file sizes up to 1GB) or there is no internet access at all. While the NBN satellite solution may enable uploading of large documents, it will still be a costly exercise compared with a terrestrial service.

ICTV would be happy to pursue an IPTV or 'hyper-local' option for its remote audiences if there was a clear commitment and capacity under the NBN to:

1. Provide adequate backhaul infrastructure, including the use of existing fibre optic networks in remote areas;
2. Provide broadband services to households within a reasonable time-frame to coincide with the withdrawal of these community broadcasting licenses and the take-up of DTH in remote communities.

Even if the federal government were to commit to 'better' broadband services for remote communities it would be at least five to ten years before an IPTV or hyper-local solution would be operational and have reasonable rates of take-up by Indigenous people in remote communities.

National Indigenous Television

Recently Minister Conroy proposed that National Indigenous TV (NITV, established in 2006) and SBS begin discussions towards establishing a free-to-air Indigenous television channel as part of the SBS digital multi-channel service. This would make NITV, or its future manifestation, available throughout Australia. However, while NITV appeals to the national mainstream audience, its programming style and urban/regional focus do not appeal to remote audiences, who prefer the language and culture and community-based content of ICTV. In broadcasting, it is important to differentiate the audience you serve.

None of the television delivery models currently being proposed – NITV, VAST, IPTV – effectively replace existing services or address remote community audience needs and/or realities of technical access. None are in Indigenous languages or are specific to remote audiences.

Closing the Gap

Remote production and broadcasting currently plays an important role in 'closing the gap' through conveying government service delivery in language, reaching the majority of people in remote communities. However, with digital switchover, much of this capability for televisual programming will be lost. Until most Indigenous households have internet access and computers or smart devices, along with IT literacy, on-line service delivery will only fill a small proportion of this gap.

There are 1113 identified remote Indigenous communities, only 147 of which are serviced by the Remote Media Sector. Through government provision of a dedicated channel on VAST, ICTV could become a key part of a solution in providing Indigenous-targeted services and 'Closing the Gap' on information services to the entire remote Australia.

Mobile Telephony and Media Delivery

Mobile telephones are increasingly being used in remote Indigenous communities, where there is coverage (via Next G), to access internet, media content and upload content produced on smart phones to the web or social networking sites. ICTV sees the use of mobile networks and smart phones as playing a key role in the future in both production and upload of content (e.g. NT Mojos model) and the distribution and sharing of media content.

However, for this to have broad impact and access, would require a significant expansion of the existing mobile network in remote Australia. Under current NBN and DBCDE planning, the addressing of telephony needs in remote areas and the expansion of mobile coverage to remote areas are not part of the NBN mandate. This seems to be a major oversight and one that will lead to an expansion of the digital divide, with 93% of Australians having access to home telephones, mobile telephony and internet access at up to 100Mbps, while people living in remote indigenous communities are still unable to get a basic telephone service.

ICTV urges that, in order to facilitate remote area access to telephony and internet services, mobile telephony be included under NBN planning, with the backhaul solutions re-considered to support this key application. This would enable remote Indigenous people to be able to be a part of the digital economy.

Summary

In this period of technological change under NBN and digital switchover, with both programs aiming to provide much-improved services to all Australian,s including Indigenous Australians living in remote parts of the country, the unfortunate outcome may be the loss of significant language and culture television services developed over 25 years.

The remote Indigenous broadcasting sector is urging the inclusion of a dedicated channel for ICTV on the VAST satellite platform to continue to support the language and cultural content needs of remote Indigenous audiences and sharing of content by remote producers.

ICTV does not see the proposal of a single-dedicated internet based platform or portal for community video content from remote communities as achievable or feasible, as it would severely limit the access by its primary target audience. While ICTV will contine to build on its on-line portal site IndigiTUBE to reach other audiences with broadband access, a dedicated free-to-air channel for ICTV is the only option for reaching the majority of audience in remote communities in the current and near future of 5 to 10 years.

We urge the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee to raise this as a matter of urgency, as communities are already being switched over to DTH reception of mainstream digital TV services (under Satellite Subsidy Scheme rollout) and losing their own community broadcasting as well as ICTV. This is a very important issue for remote indigenous people throughout Australia.

We are happy to provide further documentation or representation in support of this submission.



Rita Cattoni

Manager ICTV, and on behalf of the Board of ICTV Limited

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About ICTV

Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) is an open forum to promote and celebrate remote Indigenous talent, culture, languages, history and innovation.

ICTV is a public company limited by guarantee. Its members are made up exclusively of Indigenous people living in remote regions of Australia. ICTV is a collective, and through its collective membership supplies content produced by remote Indigenous video makers to remote Indigenous communities.

The mission of ICTV (Indigenous Community TV) is to ensure that remote Indigenous communities holding community broadcast licences and open narrowcast licences are able to exercise their right to produce and select their own content for local broadcast.

ICTV seeks to achieve this mission by:

- supporting the production of video content that focuses on strengthening Indigenous languages and culture.
- Sourcing and aggregating video content made by people in remote Indigenous communities.
- Enabling multi-platform opportunities to distribute ICTV content.
- Development of strategic relationships to enhance and increase ICTV content.
- Promoting its services to government and the wider community.

ICTV firmly believes that the needs and interests of Indigenous people living in remote regions of Australia are unique, and are best met by the people themselves. The retention of living Indigenous languages and culture is paramount to its mission. The priorities of people living in remote communities are very much based on the retention of language and culture, coupled with economic independence.

ICTV began operating on Imparja's second narrowcast satellite channel in 2002. With the withdrawal of access to this channel in July 13 2007, ICTV Limited was no longer able to broadcast to remote communities. In response to constant requests for the return of the service, ICTV launched its web-based video streaming portal, [Indigitube](#) in April 2009. Satellite television broadcasts recommenced 6 months later through the Westlink satellite service in November 2009.

Each weekend ICTV broadcasts out to remote Indigenous communities and outstations around Australia on Channel 23 on the Optus Aurora Satellite. This service has been made available to ICTV by the Western Australian government.

We currently have over 50 confirmed remote communities, outstations and prisons across Australia switching to ICTV each weekend.

ICTV provides significant opportunities for delivery of government announcements and community information in language and playing a key role in 'closing the gap' on government service delivery in remote areas.

See www.ictv.net.au for more details.