The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Issues Surrounding Cyber-Safety for Indigenous Australians

Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety

June 2013
Canberra

Contents

Membership of the Committee

Chair	Senator Catryna Bilyk	
Deputy Chair	Mr Alex Hawke MP	
Members	Mr Michael Danby MP *(until 14/05/13)*	Senator David Bushby
	Ms Nola Marino MP	Senator Scott Ludlam
	Mr Graham Perrett MP	Senator Stephen Parry
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Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Mr Russell Chafer
Inquiry Secretary	Dr Cathryn Ollif
Research Officer	Ms Loes Slattery
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	Mrs Dorota Cooley

Terms of reference

The Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety shall inquire and report on the issues surrounding cyber-safety for Indigenous Australians, particularly young people in remote and rural communities, focusing on the following areas:

1) the nature and prevalence of cyber-bullying and other risks and threats, in particular via social networking sites and mobile phones, amongst Indigenous Australians;

2) whether and how these risks and threats differ in rural and remote Indigenous communities;

3) the impact and implications of cyber-bullying and other risks and threats on access and use of information and communication technologies by Indigenous Australians;

4) ways to support Indigenous communities, including rural and remote Indigenous communities, to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying and other risks and threats.

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCAN	Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AMSANT	Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CCI	ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation
CLC	Central Land Council
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
HIP	Home Internet in Remote Communities project
IBES	Institute for a Broadband-Enabled Society
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IRCA	Indigenous Remote Communications Association

NBN   National Broadband Network

USO   Universal Service Obligation

VIYAC   Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council

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Introduction to the Inquiry

1.1   On 20 March 2013 the Committee adopted an inquiry into the issues surrounding cyber-safety for Indigenous Australians.

1.2   This inquiry followed the Committee's previous inquiries into *Cyber-Safety and the Young* and *Cybersafety for Senior Australians*. Following completion of those inquiries, the Committee believed that issues surrounding cyber-safety for Indigenous Australians warranted further, more in-depth investigation. Therefore, under paragraph (1)(b) of its Resolution of Appointment, the Committee adopted the inquiry which is the subject of this report.

1.3   As a Select Committee, under paragraph (17) of the Resolution of Appointment, the Committee must present its final report to Parliament no later than 27 June 2013. The terms of reference, which can be found at the start of this report, are far-reaching and could not be accomplished in any depth in the available timeframe.

1.4   The Committee, therefore resolved to use the available time to investigate to the extent possible what particular issues Indigenous people might be facing with cyber-safety. This brief report discusses those issues and finds that a longer, more in-depth investigation of the topic by a Committee in the 44th Parliament would be appropriate.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.5   Given the compressed timeframe, the Committee did not call for submissions for this inquiry from the general public. It did, however, write to several Australian Government departments and authorities to

notify them of the inquiry and to invite a brief submission if they wished to make one. The letter went to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE); the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA); and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

1.6   The Committee also wrote to several Indigenous organisations in the Northern Territory with an invitation to make a brief submission if they wished.

1.7   The deadline for submissions was set at 24 May. Three submissions were received (see Appendix).

1.8   The Committee visited two schools in Brisbane to discuss with their Indigenous students their concerns about cyber-safety. Evidence given at a roundtable hearing at the Southside Education school was broadcast and the Hansard is available on the Committee's website.

1.9   Various constraints prevented a public record being made of the evidence taken at the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (known as the Murri School) in Acacia Ridge, so an informal question and answer discussion between Committee Members and students and the Principal was held.

1.10   Committee members found the discussions with students at both schools to be informative and useful and are grateful for the time afforded to them by the Principal of each school, and by teachers and students.

This report

1.11   A brief background to Indigenous Information and Communications Technology (ICT) use follows in Chapter 2 of this report. Chapter 3 then discusses the risks and rewards of digital telephony for Indigenous Australians and Chapter 4 makes concluding comments and suggestions for further inquiry in the 44th Parliament.

2

Indigenous Australians and ICTs

Introduction

2.1   The Committee's inquiry into Indigenous cyber-safety and related issues builds on evidence previously taken suggesting that Indigenous Australians are increasingly subject to cyber-bullying and online racism.

2.2   Users in some remote areas have been targeted by advance fee scammers; for others where telecommunication links are just being established the potential benefits and harms are evolving.[1]

2.3   Indigenous youth are fast adopters of mobile technology, where services are available. The Committee's previous reports on cyber-safety for the young and for seniors identified a significant skills gap between cyber savvy youth and older people.[2] In remote Indigenous communities, cultural, language and access barriers exacerbate this rift, meaning mobile enabled youth may be more vulnerable to cyber-bullying and other emergent online threats as mobile access is improved.[3]

2.4   This chapter provides a brief background to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) access issues facing Indigenous Australians. It draws on published data and studies to chart demographic

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1   First Interim Committee report *Hire Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and Young*, June 2011, p.111, and Second Interim Committee report *Cybersafety for Seniors: a Worthwhile Journey*, March 2013, p. 42.

2   First Interim Committee report *Hire Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and Young*, June 2011, p.14 and Second Interim Committee report: *Cybersafety for Seniors: a Worthwhile Journey*, March 2013, p. 7.

3   See ARC Centre for Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), *Submission 2*, p. 11.

trends and patterns of ICT usage by the first Australians, before considering evidence taken on access related cyber-safety issues.

Demography

2.5   Australia's Indigenous peoples are a growing, and comparatively youthful, proportion of the Australian population.

- In the 2011 Census, three per cent of Australians identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, up from 2.3 per cent in the previous 2006 Census,[4] and an increase of 11 per cent since the 2001 Census.[5]

- The median age of the Indigenous population at 2006 was 21 years, comparing with 37 years for the non–Indigenous.[6]

2.6   The vast majority of Indigenous Australians live in urban and regional areas (over 75 per cent), but more live in remote areas than do the non-Indigenous.[7]

- Of the total 455 028 people identifying as Indigenous in the 2006 census, 108 143 lived in remote or very remote areas, comprising 54 per cent of the total remote area population.

- There are 1 187 discrete (majority) Indigenous communities in remote and very remote areas, 83 per cent have a population below 100, with 73 per cent below 50 and the average being 20 people.[8]

2.7   Indigenous populations are concentrated in some States and Territories. According to 2006 census results, the majority of Torres Strait Islanders

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4   Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *4102.0 – Australian Social Trends*, April 2013, <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30April+2013> viewed April 2013.

5   This compares with an increase of 3.8 per cent in the non-Indigenous population over the same period, ABS, 4713.0 - *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,* <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/B7164C771F4A35D7CA2578DB00283CB1?opendocument> viewed April 2013.

6   J Taylor, 'Population and Diversity: Policy Implications of Emerging Indigenous Demographic Trends', *CAEPR (*Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research) *Discussion Paper No. 283*, Australian National University 2006, p. 7.

7   ABS, *4713.0 - Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 'Where Indigenous People Live', 2006, viewed April 2013.

8   Data in this section cited in ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) and Central Land Council (CLC), *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, supported by Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), 2011, p. 9.

(64 per cent) live in Queensland, which includes the Torres Strait Area. The Northern Territory (NT) has the largest proportion of Aboriginal residents by population (32 per cent) with the majority living in remote areas, while New South Wales has the largest number of Indigenous people, constituting only two per cent of the total population and mainly resident in regional or urban areas.[9]

2.8   The NT, Western Australia and Queensland have the highest concentration of small remote communities.[10] Many of these communities were formed during the Outstation Movement of the 1970s, when Aboriginal people returned to their homelands to avoid social problems in larger communities and to maintain traditional sites. [11]

Internet and communication technology take-up

2.9   In 2007 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) produced disaggregated data based on household internet access and use gathered during the 2006 Census. The *Patterns of Internet Access in Australia* report found that:

- Indigenous people were 69 per cent less likely than the majority population to have an internet connection and 52 per cent less likely to have access to broadband;[12] and

- household access decreased with remoteness. While 54 per cent of Indigenous households in major cities had internet access, only 48 per cent in inner regions and 38 per cent in outer regions did. Remote and very remote Indigenous households had 25 per cent and eight per cent access respectively.[13]

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9   Northern Territory (NT): 79 per cent living in remote and very remote areas. New South Wales (NSW) 148 178 or 29 per cent of the total Australian population. See *ABS 4713.0 - Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,* 2006, Estimate Resident Population, viewed April 2013.

10   New profile data remote communities taken in the 2011 Census will better reflect language and intra-community affiliations. First release date 21 June 2013, with shell data available from 30 April 2013, see ABS, 2011 *Census Products and Services Release Schedule - by Product'*, <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/2011.0.55.001Main%20Features1262011> viewed April 2013.

11   CCI and CLC, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, 2011, pp. 17–18.

12   ABS, *8146.0.55.001 - Patterns of Internet Access in Australia, 2006* (2007), cited in Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 36–37,<www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311397> viewed April 2013.

13   ABS, 8146.0.55.001 - *Patterns of Internet Access in Australia*, 2006 (2007), p. 57, and see Figure 2.7, ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, p. 38.

2.10   Over 2011–2012 the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee conducted its first review of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia.[14] In its submission to that review, the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) recognised the potential of digital convergence technologies for social, service and economic development in remote Indigenous communities:

> Remote access to broadband will reduce the vast digital divide for remote Indigenous populations and provide significant outcomes in terms of social and economic development.[15]

2.11   According to the IRCA, remote Indigenous peoples are rapid adopters of new digital technologies, such as mobile smartphone telephony and ICTs when these are available.[16]

2.12   However, the ABS *Patterns of Access* study revealed that, in addition to technical barriers, socio-economic status and key indicators such as family structure, level of education and labour force status also inhibit ICT use among Indigenous Australians.[17]

Remote internet access

2.13   As indicated above, Indigenous households have very low rates of internet connectivity compared with urban and regional remote communities. ACMA's report *Telecommunications in Remote Communities* (2008) provided a survey of barriers to internet access in remote communities.[18]

2.14   A range of supply and demand factors were identified. Supply side factors included the costs and difficulty of service provision in geographically isolated and harsh desert terrain, lack of commercial incentives and so lack of choice of services providers, appropriateness of technology deployed,

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14   The Committee was appointed in July 2011 by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Senator Stephen Conroy to conduct triennial reviews of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia and to assess the potential benefits of the digital economy. See Department of the Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE), <www.dbcde.gov.au/funding_and_programs/regional_telecommunications_review> viewed June 2013.

15   The Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA), *Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry* (2011–12 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review), 2011, p. 3.

16   IRCA, *Submission to the Regional Telecommunications,* 2011, pp. 3, 4.

17   ABS, *8146.0.55.001 - Patterns of Internet Access in Australia, 2006* (2007), cited in ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 36–37.

18   See ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, p. 16 for the list of studies consulted.

distance from existing network infrastructure and problems with timely maintenance. Demand side considerations included economic disadvantage, affordability and lack of awareness, education, skills and online cultural content.[19]

2.15   The submission from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) referred to its Home Internet in Remote Communities project (HIP), a joint venture with the Centre for Appropriate Technology, Central Land Council and Swinburne University. The project aimed to investigate the feasibility of home-based computing and internet access in three small remote communities in Central Australia.[20]

2.16   The preliminary report for the project, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities* (2011), confirmed that:

■ residents lacked awareness of satellite services and government subsidies to provide them, as well as the technical knowledge and telephone contacts for the service set up;

■ meeting eligibility criteria and negotiating and paying for recurrent usage plans were obstacles for people with English as a second language;

■ due to the number of residents and their mobility, housing arrangements raised concerns about the safety and security of computer equipment and about bill paying; and

■ the cost of electricity and limited capacity under coin operated systems and solar power provided practical disincentives to home internet use in remote communities.[21]

2.17   To overcome such limitations, governments to date have focussed on the provision of shared community internet communication facilities.[22]

2.18   While progress on this has been mixed,[23] a notable success story is the Papunya Computer Room project.[24] The Centre was established in 2009, to

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19   ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 16-17.

20   In Kwale Kwale, Imangara and Mungalawurr. See ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), *Submission 2*, p. 2.

21   CCI and CLC, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities,* 2011, pp. 37, 54–55, see also CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 13.

22   ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, p. 35.

23   For example, despite plans for a shared internet facility being in place for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia since 2003, and a new National Regional Partnership Agreement in 2009, the population centre Ernabella (Pukatja) still had no functional public internet centre and no Anangu (Aboriginal) household had internet access at

provide positive stimulus to young Aboriginal men and boys (14-25 years) who missed education due to substance abuse.[25]

2.19   Recently, a Kunga (women and girls) room was opened at the PRC to provide an alternative space to this male dominated area for women and children. Research has shown that the centre has been used mainly for recreational purposes by residents, with some older residents and visitors using the facilities for tax lodgements and internet banking.[26]

2.20   The CCI referred to a study it had conducted at the PCR in 2012 to evaluate the benefits of shared computer facilities. It concluded that reliance on shared facilities in larger remote Indigenous settlements, compared with the expectation of home connection elsewhere, will exacerbate social inequalities experienced by remote Indigenous residents.[27] By contrast, equal access to communications and information technologies has:

> …the potential to extend education, health, e-government, commerce, communication and entertainment applications to remote Indigenous constituents, which will help them manage aspects of daily life and ameliorate some of the disadvantage they experience.[28]

2.21   The IRCA argued that, to avoid a 'two-speed economy' between urban and remote Australia, any new services must have adequate speeds for two way real time application if promised improvements to health, education, justice and media and for mobile telephony services are to be achieved.[29]

2.22   The CCI submission concluded that the major obstacle to home internet access for Indigenous people remains the cost of setup and maintenance.[30]

the 2011 Census. See The Anangu Lands Paper Tracker, 'Pukatja: Access to the Internet, <www.papertracker.com.au/archived/pukatja-access-to-the-internet/>viewed April 2013.

24   Papunya is a remote Aboriginal community located around 300 kilometre north-west of Alice Springs on the fringes of the Western Desert of the Northern Territory. Papunya Computer Room, Dot Com Mob: Empowering Indigenous Youth, <www.dotcommob.org/papunya.html> viewed June 2013.

25   Central Australian Youth Link-up Service, CAYLUS Project Brief, September 2012, p. [1].

26   Central Australian Youth Link-up Service, CAYLUS Project Brief, September 2012.

27   CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 2-3.

28   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 4.

29   IRCA, Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry, 2011, p. 3.

30   In contrast to mainstream Australia. Survey cited in CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 9.

Mobile phone take-up

2.23   While not all areas of Australia support mobile technologies, the smartphone has nevertheless become the dominant platform for information access and communication across Indigenous communities.

2.24   In some areas, research suggests that Indigenous people appear to be even more enthusiastic users of the technology than the mainstream community, demonstrating the importance of the new technology to maintain Indigenous social networks.[31]

2.25   Young people are rapid adopters of mobile phones. In Victoria, the majority of Aboriginal people are under the age of 25. The *Keeping Intouchable: a Community Report on the Use of Mobile Phones and Social Networking by Young Aboriginal People in Victoria* (2012) confirmed that prepaid mobile phones are now the favoured platform among Indigenous youth in the state, with popularity attributable to the growing affordability, compactness and portability of these devices.[32]

2.26   Research also confirms the rapid take-up of prepaid mobile in remote Central Australia and in the North, with prepaid mobiles being preferred for cost and credit management.[33]

2.27   The 2007 Tangentery Council Research Hub and CLC report on mobile phone use among remote low income Indigenous people in the Alice Springs area found that 60 per cent of those surveyed used the phone for emergencies and for family contacts, noting:

> For the majority, a mobile phone is considered a necessity, rather than a luxury…Connections with family and friends take on far greater importance in Aboriginal culture than in most other sections of the population for cultural reasons.[34]

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31   Studies by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2010, and the State of Victoria's Children, 2009, cited in F Edmonds, C Rachinger, J Waycott, P Morrissey, O Kelada and R Nordlinger, *'Keeping Intouchable': a Community Report on the Use of Mobile Phones and Social Networking by Young Aboriginal People in Victoria*, Institute for a Broadband-Enabled Society (IBES), University of Melbourne, Vic. 2012, p. 6.

32   See Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC), *Voices Telling It Like It Is: Indigenous Young People on Education,* Melbourne, 2011, p. 14 and P Collin, K Rahilly, I Richardson and A Third, *The Benefits of Social Networking Services: A Literature Review, Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing Melbourne*, 2011, p. 10.

33   ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 46–47 and Tangentery Council Research Hub and CLC, *Ingerrekenhe Antirrkweme, Mobile Phone Use Among Low Income Aboriginal People: a Central Australian Snapshot*, 2007, p. 6.

34   Tangentery Council Research Hub and CLC, *Ingerrekenhe Antirrkweme*, 2007, p. 6.

2.28   The IRCA observed that mobile technologies are more appropriate than fixed line telephony for Indigenous people in remote areas, given lack of effective copper wire connections and internet connectivity.[35] Smartphones best suit the needs of many Indigenous people who require a transportable internet platform which allows for individual management and prepayment of bills, avoiding shared bills in large households.[36]

2.29   Other access issues affecting remote users of mobile phones include the lack of competition among service providers in remote regions—Telstra is currently the sole provider for terrestrial wireless broadband in Central Australia.[37] ACMA suggested that the high costs of handsets and call charges may continue to place satellite mobile telephony out of reach of remote Indigenous communities.[38]

Concerns about cyber-safety and access

2.30   According to the Papunya study and HIP trials, to date cyber-safety is not regarded by residents as a significant issue, although some concerns were expressed about the use of social media sites. At Papunya, proposals for increased mobile coverage did however alarm some Elders, who were fearful of the effects on young people of mobile enabled cyber-bullying and 'sexting' they had heard about in other communities.[39]

2.31   Remote communities have been proactive in adopting measures at shared computer facilities, where problems have arisen. At Tennant Creek, the Council of Elders and Respected Persons, for example, have appointed 'cyber cops' to monitor chat room exchanges.[40] The CCI mentions the use of 'Diva Chat Cops' at chat rooms, under the auspices of the NT Justice

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35   Under Universal Service Obligation (USO) provisions, for example, all communities of 50 Indigenous permanent residents are required to have at least one pay phone, yet many remain without landline services. See CCI and CLC, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, 2011, p. 20; IRCA, *Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry*, 2011, p. 7.

36   IRCA, *Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry*, 2011, p. 7.

37   ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 46–47; CCI and CLC, *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, 2011, p. 20.

38   ACMA, *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, p. 34.

39   CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 3, 11.

40   Although there is anecdotal evidence there had been a shift to Facebook to avoid detection. ACCAN Indigenous consultation workshop, *Submission 1*, p. 2, also cited CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 6.

Department's Strong Choices program with support by Telstra, which delivers the Diva Chat social networking platform.[41]

2.32   While risks are associated with increased internet access, the potential benefits drive government plans to expand satellite services into remote areas under the National Broadband Network (NBN).[42] The NT Government and Telstra have also recently announced a joint initiative to provide new mobile and fixed broadband services to remote Territorian communities.[43]

2.33   Given these developments, the CCI predicts there will be a greater uptake of ICTs by remote Aboriginal households through subscriptions to mobile or satellite services and the use of low range private wifi networks.[44]

2.34   Smartphones and other portable ICTs have utility to remote peoples, which will likely ensure rapid adoption where services are available and affordable.[45] The CCI warns that community capacity to provide protections, such as by monitoring shared chat rooms, will no longer be effective as individual and home access becomes more common.[46]

2.35   The submission from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) advised of recent changes to the *Northern Territory Emergency Response Act 2007*, which required the monitoring of chat room activities to limit access to sexually explicit and violent material in publically funded computer centres. The changes respond to the introduction of smartphone and tablet technology, and to complaints from medical services that compulsory filters restricted their practice.[47]

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41   See CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 15-16, and Chapter 3 for more detail on Diva Chat and the Strong Choices initiative.

42   NBN Co. Ltd launched the first Interim Satellite Service across the mainland and Tasmania in July 2011 <www.nbnco.com.au/nbn-for-home/how-it-works/satellite.html> viewed 23 April 2013, and see Australian Communications Media Authority (ACMA), *Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities,* March 2008, pp. 31–34.

43   Including the installation of eight new mobile sites at Ampilatwatja, Arlparra, Barrow Creek, Mutitjulu, Newcastle Waters, Palumpa, Papunya and Peppimenarti, and of ADSL2+ fixed broadband equipment at Mutitjulu, Hermannsburg, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Elliott and Wadeye. See Telstra citation in CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 18.

44   CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 17–18.

45   Researchers returning to Papunya in December 2012, six months after the CCI survey, found for example that many in the community had portable tablets after an upgrade of software allowed for PRC syncing with personal devices. CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 17, and see Central Australian Youth Link-up Service, CAYLUS Project Brief, September 2012, p. [3].

46   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 17.

47   In particular, the ability to work with medical images on computers. See Department of Families, Housing and Indigenous Services (FaHCSIA), *Submission 3*, p. 3.

2.36   FaHCSIA reports that the new requirements will be part of funding agreements with all government service providers, not just those in Indigenous communities, to take 'reasonable steps' to protect clients, and in particular children, from accessing or viewing harmful material. An education program, the Stronger Futures Classification Education Project, will support Indigenous communities in 'prohibited material areas' to better understand what constitutes unacceptable material, under restrictions to continue until 2022.[48]

2.37   Submissions to the inquiry identified a more urgent need to raise digital literacy among Indigenous Elders and seniors in particular so they can manage mobile enabled cyber-bullying and other threats effectively as services improve in remote communities: [49]

> It is important to engage elders in responding to cyber-bullying because they have the authority to provide leadership to younger people about what is culturally appropriate in regard to use of ICTs concerning the potential risks of crossing cultural boundaries and causing distress to other community members. Education about the risks and implications of cyber-bullying in regard to legal and civic responsibilities also need to be provided to those using ICTs in remote communities.[50]

2.38   The CCI also recommended implementation of a local area network model of access in larger communities, so that network level filtering might be conducted in accordance with the specific concerns of Elders and residents.[51]

2.39   Evidence to the inquiry indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth have skills with internet technology equivalent to that of mainstream children. It was noted at Southside Education, a school for disadvantaged girls in suburban Brisbane, that even where English and maths skills are lacking, Indigenous students have a 'very solid grasp of technology' despite not having a computer at home.[52]

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48   The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* legislation which will be reviewed and reported on to the Australian Parliament by September 2015. See FaHCSIA, *Submission 3*, p. 6, and FaHCSIA, Stronger Futures Fact Sheet <www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/stronger-futures-fact-sheet> viewed June 2013.

49   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 4; ACCAN, *Submission 1*, pp. 2, 3.

50   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 14.

51   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 17.

52   Mrs Christine Hill, Principal South side Education, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 3.

2.40   The Committee was told that young Indigenous people routinely use mobile technology for information and music downloads, as well as keeping in contact with family and friends. The students at Southside Education and at the Murri School all had mobile phones but, according to the Southside Education Principal, 'for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, having a computer and internet access in the home are very, very rare'.[53]

Conclusion

2.41   At present, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have low levels of home internet access compared with other Australians, irrespective of where they live.

2.42   Indigenous people are thus at particular risk of being left behind as other Australians utilise home internet access and go online. At the same time, the rapid take up of smartphone and tablet technology ameliorates that risk while opening up a range of other threats, some of which are uniquely nuanced by Indigenous cultural practices and social norms.

2.43   Given the planned nationwide rollout of the NBN and other initiatives, the Committee believes that Indigenous communities must be empowered to manage online risks, and to make decisions about the nature of the services they receive.

2.44   The terms of reference of this inquiry invite comparison between risks for urban and remote communities. In the Committee's opinion, a more lengthy inquiry is necessary to survey views on the best means to facilitate internet access for all Indigenous Australians, and to enable them to exploit the benefits of the internet and to do so safely.

2.45   The next chapter looks at the prevalence of mobile phone use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the cyber-safety implications for young people in particular.

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53   Mrs Hill, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 6.

3

Smartphones, the risks and rewards

Introduction

3.1   While cyber threats to Indigenous people are generally commensurate with those experienced by other members of the community, there are specific risks, and also some strengths, which arise out of the particular circumstances affecting many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders compared with other Australians.

3.2   As discussed in the previous chapter, Indigenous people's use of the internet is predicated extensively but not exclusively on the availability of services. Smartphones have emerged as the preferred online platform, given limited household internet connectivity and the life circumstances of many Indigenous Australians.

3.3   The Committee received evidence that cyber-safety threats have not yet materialised in shared internet facilities in remote regions but in larger communities and regional centres, where mobile phone coverage is possible, cyber-bullying is reported as an emergent concern.[1]

3.4   At hearings in Brisbane the Committee took the opportunity to investigate these developments with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers. This chapter records their responses, supplemented by research and evidence taken in submissions.

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1   ARC Centre for Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), *Submission 2*, pp. 1, 3, 5.

Mobile phones and cyber-safety

3.5   As for other young people in the community, mobile phones are a valuable communication tool for Indigenous youth who are enthusiastic adopters of the technology.[2]

3.6   Smartphones provide full internet connectivity, allowing for real-time online interaction through e-mail and social networking sites as well as the viewing, downloading and sharing of music, images and video material with other phones and computers. Research has suggested that this online interconnectivity can be hugely beneficial to disadvantaged or marginalised youth. Online interaction allows for those with lesser social skills to tap into potentially supportive networks and develop transferrable skills for offline engagement.[3]

3.7   For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people smartphone technologies can provide important links to family and community, especially where these have been fragmented by past policies or by the necessity of moving for schooling, training or work. At the same time, mobiles allow for a 24 hour cycle of cyber intrusions, which can lead to breaches of privacy and conflict both verbal and physical.[4]

3.8   The Australian Communications Consumer Advocacy Network (ACCAN), which has sponsored research on remote internet access,[5] notes in its submission:

> Research shows that mobile phones, where coverage is available, are the preferred communications device for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This strongly suggests that most cyber-bullying in the Indigenous community is likely to occur through the use of mobile phones.[6]

3.9   In 2010, the Committee's *Cyber-Safety and the Young* report recorded concerns from the Northern Territory (NT) Government about the increasing prevalence of bullying and 'sexting' via mobile phones, and its

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2   See previous chapter for detail.

3   P Collin, K Rahilly, I Richardson and A. Third, *The Benefits of Social Networking Services: a Literature Review,* Co-operative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing, Melbourne, 2011, p. 10.

4   Mrs Christine Hill, Principal, Southside Education, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, pp. 1–2.

5   CCI and Central Land Council (CLC), *Home Internet for Remote Indigenous Communities*, funded by Australian Communications Consumer Advocacy Network (ACCAN), 2011.

6   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

impact on Indigenous young people.[7] A survey in Western Australia also suggested that Indigenous youth are less likely to reveal that they have been the victimised.[8]

3.10   Within the time constraints of this inquiry, it was not feasible to conduct an adequate evaluation of these developments in rural or remote communities nor to consult key stakeholders and experts in the field. As a consequence, the Committee determined to conduct a limited survey among Indigenous secondary students in an urban environment, where mobile ownership is universal, to establish their concerns and priorities.

3.11   The Committee visited the traditional lands of the Gubbi Gubbi and the nations of the Turrbal and Ningy Ningy peoples in suburban Brisbane.[9] Evidence was taken in Sunnybank at Southside Education, a private college for socially disadvantaged girls, around 45 per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.[10]

3.12   An informal roundtable discussion was also held with students and teachers at the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (known as the Murri School) in Acacia Ridge.

Cyber-bullying, grooming and racism

3.13   In Indigenous social circles high value is placed on avoiding a 'shame job', either as victim, perpetrator or observer in an embarrassing situation.[11] The Committee heard how the internet can act as a vector for online teasing prevalent in Indigenous cultures. The ACCAN submitted:

>   Cyber-bullying amongst Indigenous Australians must be considered in its cultural context. In the Torres Strait, for example, social 'mocking', which is usually a light hearted comment

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7   Sexting involves the conveyance of sexually explicit or suggestive images or content via mobile, see Interim Committee report *Hire Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and Young*, June 2011, p. 96, and Northern Territory (NT) Government, *Submission 84*, p. 7.

8   Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, *Submission 54*.1, pp. 1–2, and see Interim Committee report *Hire Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and Young*, June 2011, Report, p. 111.

9   Guide to the Gubbi Gubbi Nation, <www.gubbigubbi.com/Gubbi_Gubbi_Traditional_ Custodians.pdf> and see Our Redcliffe, <www.cirp.org.au/index.php/our-redcliffe> and Extract of Speech, Maroochy Baramba, Tom Petrie Memorial -21 Sept 2010, Daki Budtcha <dakibudtcha.com.au/Turrbal/> viewed April 2013.

10   Mrs Christine Hill, Principal, Southside Education, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 2.

11   L de Plevitz, 'Systemic Racism: the Hidden Barrier to Educational Success for Indigenous School Students', *Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 51, 1, pp. 63–65.

directed at a friend or relative and easily understood in a face to face exchange, can become a more serious form of bullying when it occurs online. This is because while someone may 'mock' a friend or relative on their Facebook page and intend little harm, the ability of others to add a comment can lead to many people joining in the 'mocking'.[12]

3.14   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mr Mick Gooda has referred to 'lateral violence', a term for violence and aggression within Indigenous communities and directed at its members, as 'the legacy of our dispossession and oppression'.[13] In the cyber context, 'teasing' becomes 'lateral violence': online shaming or cyber-bullying in the form of offensive rumours and gossip spread across Indigenous social networks.[14]

3.15   ACCAN advised that cyber-bullying between peers in Indigenous communities can induce high levels of despair.[15]

3.16   The Committee heard anecdotally at the Murri School that bullying is often 'generational', with victims at home becoming bullies at school and online. A young Murri man confirmed that some young people are reluctant to report bullying but neither can they move on from online attacks. In the end, this can lead to suicide. The youth urged the Committee to seek ways to address this cycle.[16]

Facebook to 'fightbook'

3.17   The Committee also learned that online abuse can lead to actual physical violence or risky person to person interactions. The CCI elaborated on the impact in remote communities where: 'mobile coverage tended to prioritise problems such as fights amongst young people "triggered by texts or posts on chat room sites"'.[17]

3.18   The CCI submission referred to the popularity of the Telstra platform Diva Chat which allows for cheap mobile phone interaction using a 3G network

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12   Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), *Submission 1*, p. 2.

13   Australian Human Rights Commission, *Changing the Conversation: Statement from Mick Gooda (2012 News)*, 2 February 2012, <www.humanrights.gov.au/news/stories/changing-conversation-statement-mick-gooda-2012-news> viewed May 2013.

14   F Edmonds *et al*, '*Keeping Intouchable': a Community Report*, Vic, 2012, p. 26.

15   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, pp. 2, 3.

16   Advice to the Committee, Informal discussion with students and teachers, Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (the Murri School), Acacia Ridge, 7 May 2013 (no transcript).

17   Such as too much time spent watching Auststar TV etc., CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 5.

(95 cents a day unlimited usage). CCI notes the site has become known as the 'Indigenous Facebook', and has a reputation for promoting 'trash talk' and other forms of cyber-bullying across remote communities.[18]

3.19   At the Murri School, Principal Philomena Downey told the Committee that her term for Facebook is 'fightbook', given the frequent escalation of after-hours online conflict into school time dynamics.[19] Southside Education's Principal Christine Hill confirmed that, typically, weekend and other post school interactions via social networking sites leads to the fear of, or actual, verbal or physical abuse at school on Monday.[20]

3.20   Southside students Carmen, in year 11, and Karley, year 12, advised:

> Carmen: Facebook is involved in everyone's life, so if you have a problem you put it on there and then everyone just kind of goes on about it on Facebook.

> Karley: Yes, and everyone has to put their two cents in, which is where the conflict starts.[21]

3.21   Mrs Hill referred to the effect of online 'de-individuation', which depersonalises the sender and the recipient in these online exchanges.[22] She also noted that the frequent sharing of passwords allows for inflammatory posts to be made on other peoples' pages. She considered that students generally lack knowledge about privacy and other regulatory restraints and protections governing online engagement.[23]

Online grooming

3.22   Another concern at Southside was the vulnerability of the younger girls, in the grades eight to nine age group, to online grooming conducted by predators via smartphone and Facebook. Mrs Hill advised that, over the two years she has been at the school, she has reported the activities of a number of online predators to the (Queensland) Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.[24]

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18   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 6, and see Clare Rawlinson , 'Diva Chat',' Re-shaping Remote Communities', 105. 7, ABC Darwin, 5 January 2013, <www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/12/22/3396787.htm> viewed May 2013.

19   Informal discussion with students and teachers, the Murri School, 7 May 2013 (no transcript).

20   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, pp. 1, 2.

21   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 6.

22   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 3.

23   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 3.

24   Mrs Christine Hill, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, pp. 3–4.

3.23   The Committee also learned from the CCI submission of similar developments enabled by the Diva Chat platform in Central Australia, where non-Indigenous truck drivers and other itinerant workers solicit teenage Aboriginal girls via the site when passing through towns. [25]

Cyber racism

3.24   The Committee was concerned about the reported increase of cyber racism and its impacts on Indigenous wellbeing. The ACCAN stated:

> An important aspect of cyber-bullying for Indigenous Australians is racism. Racist comments and portrayals of Indigenous people that can be found on the internet can have a negative effect on Indigenous users. This can occur on sites such as Facebook and YouTube where Indigenous people may be harassed or have racist comments left about them, and may force people to abandon the use of information and communications technology.[26]

3.25   The recent *'Keeping Intouchable'* community report on smartphone use among Indigenous youth in Victoria found that online racism, along with 'lateral violence', was regularly experienced among the survey group. However, the young people also felt that the small size of Indigenous social networks could be protective, as cyber-bullies and other persecutors can easily be identified. [27]

3.26   At Southside Education, Indigenous students confirmed that 'Respect' is the mantra at the school but externally generated online racist material is prevalent, especially on Facebook. At the Murri School, the students also felt safe with their friends but said that racist content on Facebook is a problem. It was conjectured that mainstream students are more at risk of cyber-bullying, given the capacity for anonymous attacks.[28]

3.27   ACCAN suggested that education programs are required to raise awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the

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25   CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 6–7.

26   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, pp. 2–3.

26   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

27   F Edmonds, C Rachinger, J Waycott, P Morrissey, O Kelada and R Nordlinger, *'Keeping Intouchable': a Community Report on the Use of Mobile Phones and Social Networking by Young Aboriginal People in Victoria*, Institute for a Broadband-Enabled Society (IBES), University of Melbourne, Vic. 2012, pp. 24–26.

28   Carmen, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 3, Informal discussion with students, the Murri School, 7 May 2013 (no transcript).

protections afforded them under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, so they can be confident to express their cultural identities online.[29]

Cultural conflict and connection

3.28   Indigenous Australians are a unique and diverse peoples speaking many languages and belonging to many distinct cultural groups. At the same time, collectively:

> They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples…[30]

3.29   As noted above, it has been suggested that the incidence of lateral violence in Indigenous communities can be seen as a consequence of colonisation. However, this can also be read as an assertion of collective identity and even an extension of culturally accepted practice.

3.30   The concept of 'payback' is an aspect of customary law, where punishments are meted out according to the offence.[31] The CCI noted that the most threatening aspect of mobile technology and social networking platforms for cyber-bullying in remote Central Australian settlements is its 'potential to cross personal, social, cultural and geographical boundaries rapidly', inflaming existing conflicts.[32]

3.31   The CCI cited a case where paypack activities went viral during conflict between two camps in Yuendemu, after the death of a young man:

> Young women used mobile phones to send inflammatory messages, including altered photographs of deceased family members, via Telstra BigPond's Diva Chat platform to members of the other camp. The transmission of these messages led to further physical fighting between young men in the community…The use

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29   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 3.

30   United Nations, *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples* (Background Paper 2004), cited in D Jacobsen, 'Building Knowledge for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Tourism: Lessons from Comparable Tourism Initiatives around the World', *Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) Working Paper CW011*, Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs, 2013, p. 8.

31   'Tribal Punishment, Customary Law and Payback', Creative Spirits website <www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/tribal-punishment-customary-law-payback> viewed May 2013.

32   CCI, *Submission 2*, pp. 9–10.

of these identities and related images was highly disturbing to community members, as it violated Warlpiri cultural customs that prohibit using the name or viewing images of the dead. The situation was exacerbated when people from another community a couple of hundred kilometres away began to send bullying phone messages, crossing distances and boundaries that would not normally be so easily crossed. [33]

3.32   Despite such developments, the Committee also heard that mobile phones and Facebook contact can be a positive and protective mechanism, both socially and culturally, for Indigenous people. [34]

3.33   Principal Hill advised that a number of girls attending the school are effectively homeless, or 'couch surfing', and may lack food and clothing, but 99 per cent of them have a smartphone of their own. [35] The Committee was told that having a mobile provides a 'sense of safety'. In effect, these young people carry their 'house' in their pockets, with everything meaningful contained. [36]

3.34   Smartphones can also be culturally affirming. CCI research in remote communities found that while some Elders were fearful about the negative consequences of new and extended mobile coverage in remote communities, other senior women considered the phones to be good for physical safety, as well as for conducting urgent cultural matters such as sorry business. [37]

3.35   Southside Education students, some of whom had travelled far to attend the school, explained that Facebook enables them to keep in contact with their home and culture. It was also noted that some children had regained lost family connections though social networking. [38]

3.36   The Committee heard that the social networking site also allows students to sustain and practise traditional languages and dialects. [39] Year 11 student Carmen reported that she, for instance, communicates in Creole to her family in the Torres Strait. [40]

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33   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 9.

34   Miss Williams, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 10.

35   Mrs Hill, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 2.

36   Discussion with students at the Murri School, 7 May 2013 (no transcript).

37   Based on HIP research in Papunya, CCI, HIP, *Submission 2*, p. 11.

38   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 10.

39   Karley and Carmen, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, pp. 7, 9.

40   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 9.

3.37   Miss Nicole Williams, teacher and mentor at Southside Education, commented on the vitality of the online language environment:

> There is a web page I have seen where not only do they use Torres Strait Islander Creole but they use the shorthand text version of it. It is really fascinating how some people have adapted the technology to suit their needs.[41]

3.38   Miss Williams confirmed that while Facebook can be used destructively, the site allows students to consolidate their identity such as by sharing their experiences of racism, both on and offline, and to debate the issues.[42] She referred to occasions when online discussion had de-escalated intra-community conflict, following sensationalised media reportage.[43]

Cyber-safety initiatives

3.39   One of the key messages to the Committee was the need for appropriate educational approaches to be developed to address the particular circumstances of Indigenous people.

3.40   Most significant was the marked generational gap between mobile enabled and internet savvy youth, and family members at home who may be less familiar with internet functions or without internet access. Southside Education Principal Mrs Hill stated:

> For young people, technology is now part of their lives; we are not going to remove it from their lives. It is important for their benefit that their parents also have the capacity to access and utilise that technology, because usually it is through the family that young people receive guidance and learn what they should look out for and be careful about. For those reasons it is very important that we continue to work for equity in literacy and technology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[44]

3.41   One of the most concerning risks of mobile activity raised with the Committee was the likelihood of suicide, resulting from unaddressed cyber-bullying.

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41   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 9.
42   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 9.
43   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 5.
44   *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 10.

3.42   The Committee heard about a range of measures addressing Indigenous cyber-bullying under the Strong Choices Project, a joint initiative between the NT Justice Department, Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT), National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) and SkinnyFish, a musical and digital media production company.[45]

3.43   One of these measures was the 'Strong Choices' music video, featuring the Tiwi Island band B2M which started out in 2004–06 to address the outbreak of youth suicide on the islands. AMSANT's John Paterson explained:

> Most of our clinicians and Aboriginal health workers are saying that there are linkages to suicide and this texting, cyber-bullying texting, that's going on in communities at the moment. [46]

3.44   The video will be circulated via mobile messages across remote communities and in a broader national campaign by the AFP.[47]

3.45   As mentioned in the previous chapter, the CCI noted the importance of ensuring Elders and older people in remote communities are knowledgeable about ICT use and cyber-bullying so that they can provide leadership to youth about culturally appropriate online activities.[48]

3.46   The Committee referred to the introduction of 'chat room' monitors at Tennant Creek, which was also part of the Strong Choices Project,[49] and to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' (FaHCSIA) Stronger Futures education program which addresses challenges posed by the availability of sexually explicit material, including mobile 'sexting', to traditional cultural values.[50]

3.47   Ms Eileen Deemal-Hall, who developed the Stronger Choices initiative for the NT Justice Department, referred to the importance of informing

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45   Funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), see CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 14.

46   *ABC News*, 'The Fight against Cyber-bullying in Remote Aboriginal Communities,' Transcript, <www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-17/the-fight-against-cyber-bullying-in-remote/4206910> viewed April 2013.

47   ABC News 'The Fight against Cyber-bullying in Remote Aboriginal Communities' <www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-17/the-fight-against-cyber-bullying-in-remote/4206910>

48   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 14.

49   Although there is anecdotal evidence there had been a shift to Facebook to avoid detection. ACCAN Indigenous consultation workshop, *Submission 1*, p. 2, also cited CCI, HIP, *Submission 2*, p. 6.

50   See discussion in FaHCSIA, *Submission 3*, pp. 4–7.

remote users about internet protocols and security in culturally appropriate terms:

> The story we use…we call it Digital Footprints. When an Aboriginal person goes from their country, whether they are a Larrakia person, might come over to my country, you find ways to protect yourself. It's not like when you leave footprints in your own country, eventually rain washes away wind washes away… it stays there forever.[51]

Conclusion

3.48   The Committee notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, with support of key government and community stakeholders, are proactive in developing cyber-safety initiatives in terms that are understood and embraced by their peoples.

3.49   The evidence taken has confirmed that there are strong protective mechanisms in Indigenous culture which can be leveraged to safeguard the vulnerable, including youth, from potential online harms. However, there are also reasons to believe that the rollout of new services into remote areas could exacerbate intercommunity conflict while diminishing community capacity to manage such developments.

3.50   In most cases, the benefits of smartphone connectivity for Indigenous Australians are otherwise obvious. Family and cultural connections can be kept up at a distance, which may lesson disincentives to take up work and schooling in other areas. Alternatively, the capacity to remain 'on country' and access services or set up a business becomes possible.

3.51   The Committee believes that a more detailed consideration of options to develop empowering and culturally appropriate education and other protective measures to address 'lateral violence', racism and other external threats to Indigenous people, young and old, would be beneficial.

3.52   The Committee also considers that a future inquiry could investigate the broader benefits of the digital economy to Indigenous Australians, while surveying any particular barriers and risks for delivery of health and other services or development of businesses online, particularly in regional and remote areas.

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51   Cited in Clare Rawlinson, '"Divas Chat", Re-shaping Remote Communities', 105. 7, ABC Darwin, 5 January 2013.

4

Future considerations

4.1 Due to the short timeframe in the lead up to the Federal election, the Committee could not undertake a comprehensive investigation of the terms of reference for this inquiry. However, evidence gathered during its limited investigation indicates that it would be worthwhile for a subsequent Parliamentary Committee to canvass many of the issues raised in Chapters 2 and 3 in an inquiry with a much longer available timeframe.

4.2 The Committee notes that within the context of the broader access issues discussed in Chapter 2, Indigenous people are at particular risk of being left behind as most Australians gain internet access and go online.

4.3 Evidence gathered during the Committee's inquiry into *Cybersafety for Senior Australians* strongly suggested that in the immediate future, Australians without access to the internet or without the skills to use the internet will become an increasingly disadvantaged group within society. The ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) stated that:

> … existing inequalities experienced by Aboriginal people, especially within remote areas, may well be exacerbated if they are not provided with opportunities to enjoy the same benefits from ICTs as non-Indigenous Australian populations. Access to information and communications technologies has the potential to extend education, health, e-government, commerce, communication and entertainment applications to remote Indigenous constituents, which will help them manage aspects of

> daily life and ameliorate some of the disadvantage they
> experience.[1]

4.4   As Chapter 2 demonstrates, many Indigenous Australians lack access to the internet for various reasons. Without access, cyber-safety considerations are somewhat moot. The Committee suggests that a more lengthy inquiry could establish the best means to facilitate home or community access among Indigenous people and also to train and otherwise assist rural and remote communities to exploit the benefits of the internet and to do so safely. This would include among its priorities a training component about cyber-safety issues. The CCI noted this need, stating:

> Not surprisingly, given their limited access to and experience of ICTs, many remote Indigenous settlements are characterised by low levels of digital literacy which may mean that without further education and skills development in this regard, community members will find dealing with cyber-safety issues particularly challenging and distressing.[2]

4.5   Policymakers must remain aware of the inherent contradictions of any policy framework which emphasises 'equal access' but fails to take into account the distinct nature of need and the lived circumstances of Indigenous Australians, especially in remote communities.[3] CCI stated:

> A significant question is the degree to which cyber-bullying and cyber-safety require a different approach in remote communities to that which is being pursued for the mainstream Australian population.[4]

4.6   These factors need to be considered in the formation of any policy which aims to address cyber-safety issues for culturally distinct, marginalised and socially disadvantaged groups, such as those in remote communities.

4.7   Another key factor in ICT use by Indigenous people, as noted above, is that many Indigenous Australians have low levels of digital literacy skills and therefore they lack the ability to use the internet themselves or to supervise their children adequately on the internet. Additionally, the

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1   ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), *Submission 2*, p. 4.

2   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 9.

3   See discussion in J Altman and S Russell, '"Too Much Dreaming": Evaluations of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Intervention 2007-2012', *Evidence Base, Issue 3*, 2012, The Australian and New Zealand School of Government, CAEPR, ANU, and see Dr B Walker, Dr D Porter and Prof. I Marsh, *Fixing the Hole in Australia Heartland: How Government Needs to Work in Remote Australia*, Desert Knowledge Australia, September 2012.

4   CCI, *Submission 2,* p. 3.

Committee heard that many older Indigenous people have low levels of English literacy too. As the Principal of Southside Education told the Committee:

> Often there is a great disparity for our students between their level of literacy and the level of literacy of their parents.[5]

4.8   The relative newness of the technology and lack of digital literacy amongst older groups makes it difficult for Elders and others in community leadership positions to respond effectively to cyber-safety issues and to develop and implement culturally appropriate strategies and parameters for ICT use in remote communities, according to the CCI.[6]

4.9   The Australian Communications Consumer Advocacy Network (ACCAN) told the Committee that 'there is often a lack of awareness and familiarity surrounding ICT in Indigenous communities, particularly in remote communities where ICT adoption is relatively new'.[7]

4.10   Additionally, Indigenous children in remote areas are traditionally permitted a higher degree of autonomy than non-Indigenous children and therefore:

> Different approaches may be needed for remote Indigenous communities, emphasising engagement between older and younger generations in relation to ICTs and providing information to parents and older community members about, for example, mobile phone and social networking usage.[8]

4.11   As discussed in Chapter 3 of this report, the mobile phone is the preferred communications device for younger urban Indigenous Australians. ACCAN notes that 'most cyber-bullying in the Indigenous community is likely to occur through the use of mobile phones'.[9]

4.12   Furthermore, ACCAN notes that cyber-bullying in rural and remote communities 'may be directly related to an ongoing family or language group conflict, and can impact the whole community'.[10]

4.13   As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, adults interviewed in the remote Papunya community have mixed feelings about the value of mobile phones: some of the senior men could see benefits of having mobile phone

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5   Mrs Christine Hill, Principal, Southside Education, *Committee Hansard*, 7 May 2013, p. 1.

6   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 10.

7   The Australian Communications Consumer Advocacy Network (ACCAN), *Submission 1*, p. 3.

8   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 12.

9   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

10 ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

access but also believe access to mobiles can feed or create conflict whereas some of the women interviewed were more positive, viewing mobiles as good for physical safety reasons and for urgent matters like sorry business and emergencies.[11]

4.14   Noting the emphasis in the inquiry's terms of reference on cyber-bullying, ACCAN pointed out that cyber-bullying is not the only issue of concern for many Indigenous communities, rather:

> … cyber-safety incorporates a wide range of issues, including protecting sensitive cultural information and online financial security. Of particular importance is the need to raise awareness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the implications of misguided internet use.[12]

4.15   The CCI made a similar point:

> We are concerned that the Inquiry may be responding primarily to media reports and anecdotal evidence highlighting cyber-bullying incidents, rather than listening to, raising the awareness of and incorporating the views of Indigenous Australians around a broad range of cyber-safety issues. Comprehensive evaluation and research is required to determine the dimensions and extent of cyber-bullying issues in Central Australia and the most effective strategies for addressing cyber-safety in remote Indigenous communities generally.[13]

4.16   The Committee agrees with ACCAN and the CCI that cyber-bullying is just one aspect of cyber-safety for Indigenous Australians. Cyber-safety for Indigenous Australians incorporates a wide range of issues including, but certainly not limited to, issues of cyber-bullying and racism.

4.17   Based on the brief inquiry that it was able to do in the limited timeframe, the Committee finds that a far-reaching inquiry in the 44th Parliament to investigate all aspects of ICT access and use by Indigenous Australians, including cultural, policy, cyber-safety and literacy issues is required.

4.18   Such an inquiry could be of great benefit to inform future policy and direction relating to the issues which comprise cyber-safety across Indigenous communities. The inquiry would be able to take evidence from many stakeholders and, as the CCI suggests, the Committee would have the opportunity to listen to, raise the awareness of and incorporate the

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11   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 11.

12   ACCAN, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

13   CCI, *Submission 2*, p. 3.

views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders around a broad range of cyber-safety issues.

4.19   In closing, the Committee would like to thank everyone who contributed to this inquiry: the Principals, teachers and students at the two schools which the Committee visited in Brisbane and ACCAN, CCI and FaHCSIA for their submissions.

Senator Catryna Bilyk
Chair

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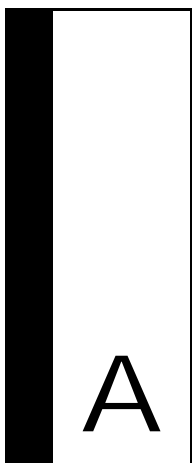
Appendix A – Evidence

Tuesday, 7 May 2013 – Brisbane

Roundtable discussion

Southside Education, Sunnybank

> Mrs Christine Hill, Principal
>
> Miss Nicole Williams, Teacher
>
> Karley, Year 12 student
>
> Carmen, Year 11 student

Site visit

Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School, Acacia Ridge

Submissions

1. Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)

2. ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology

3. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs