

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

- 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.<sup>2</sup>

- 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

- 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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'.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup>

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'.<sup>9</sup>

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'.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup>

- 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.<sup>12</sup>

- 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.<sup>13</sup>

- 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 44<sup>th</sup> 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**

