



BIRRR IN THE BIG SMOKE

A chance to take the Data Drought battle to the major decision makers over the past fortnight saw BIRRR representatives head to Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane last week, taking in awards events, roundtable discussions, national forums and meetings with ministerial staff.

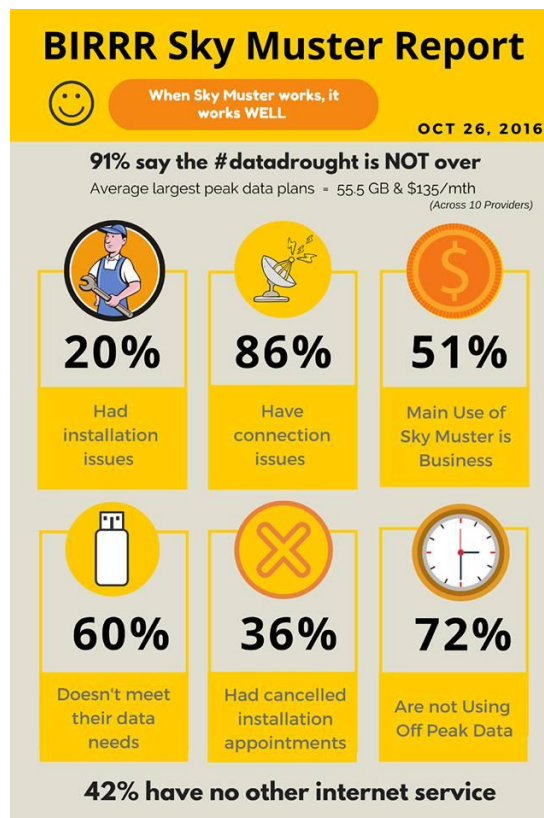
Admin team members for lobby group 'Better Internet for Rural Regional and Remote Australia', Kristy Sparrow and Kylie Stretton, represented rural internet users across the country as they addressed the NFF National Congress and shared concerns with Ministerial advisors at Parliament House. Fellow admins Julie Stott attended the ACCAN roundtable in Sydney, while Amanda Salisbury joined Kristy for nbn video hookup from Brisbane.

Kristy took to the stage in a panel discussion on '*Telecommunications in the Bush*', before a large crowd at the NFF annual congress alongside Iñaki Berroeta (Vodafone), Bill Morrow (CEO, NBN Co) and Senator Fiona Nash (Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Local Government & Territories Minister for Regional Communications).

She introduced the BIRRR group to those gathered, explaining its history, purpose and actions.

"BIRRR is a community of volunteers that help guide Tripe R people through the bush telecommunications 'jungle'. We have contributed over 8000 volunteer hours and filled a large gap that no one else seems to want to tackle. We work alongside all interested parties to highlight issues and to offer solutions where possible," Kristy told the NFF Congress crowd.

Kristy told individual stories of BIRRR members battling to gain decent connection to run businesses, educate their children and stay connected in an increasingly digital world. She also shared some interim results from a survey currently being run by BIRRR.



Ongoing issues with the long-term internet satellite, SkyMuster, described by nbn as a 'game changer', were also addressed. One strong survey result shows that 42% of respondents using SkyMuster have no other form of internet.

"We hope Sky Muster will become more reliable and that the so-called 'teething problems' that have plagued the last few months can be sorted quickly," Kristy said.

"It is imperative that sky muster becomes much more reliable, and meets the needs of RRR users - the outages and issues over the past few months have devastated some rural businesses and jeopardised children's education."

"Bush people are required, and expected to have, connectivity. There *must* be greater investment in ensuring bush communities have the tools to meet business needs."

BIRRR received confirmation last week that nbn co have:

- changed its call centre policy and protocols so that satellite end users will not be referred immediately to their RSP.
- nbn's call centre will now be able to provide basic network outage information so that callers will at the very least know if the network is down in their area.
- set up 'a dedicated regional support team inside this call centre to handle rural addressing issues, location I.D generation, non-standard fixed wireless installs, or other issues that people living in regional, rural and remote areas experience'.
- nbn will also incorporate this approach into its official Facebook page, nbn Australia.

The announcement of this change of policy in the nbn customer call centre, just prior to the NFF Congress, was met with cautious approval.

"We are looking forward to nbn providing more direct and responsive communication to end users – we will continue to work with industry groups and government to ensure nbn understands the significance of the data drought and the urgent need to address bush connectivity," Kristy said.

During her meetings and at the Congress, Kristy also told Senator Nash, nbn co and provider reps that they needed to work toward establishing:

- A funded extension and advisory service - a 'technology hub' to help guide people
- Extending the fixed wireless footprint, especially to towns currently on ADSL, yet mapped for Sky Muster
- Providers & nbn to establish RRR call centres.

"The bush needs urgent assistance in getting connected and having plans that meet their needs. For RRR regions to grow it is essential for businesses, families and communities to have access to, and be able to best utilise, digital technology. We need to ensure our towns and communities are not disadvantaged in the digital age due to our postcode and population.

"BIRRR appreciated the opportunity to have a discussion with nbn co's CEO and reps, to be part of the ACCAN roundtable, to present at the NFF Congress, meet with Minister Nash's office, nbn and Department of Communications. We feel like we were heard in our meetings with each of these important industry groups."

Kristy also recently won the Innovation and Leadership category at the [Queensland Regional Achievement and Community Awards](#) in Brisbane.

"It has been a hectic couple of weeks, but we feel like we are making some headway in addressing bush broadband issues," Kristy said.

Sky Muster customers seeking nbn support on outages and nbn-related issues can call 1800 687 626 or email info@nbnco.com.au.

The BIRRR group page can be found [here](#), with website resource [here](#).