BIRRR TARGETS 'CIRCLE OF BLAME' BUSH BROADBAND TRAIN

The BIRRR advocate group has (once again) showcased to the Federal Government the ever-growing challenges end users face in getting decent bush broadband connections, likening the system to deliver and maintain rural, regional and remote internet services to a 'driverless train' which seems destined to track along a 'circle of blame'.

BIRRR representatives, Kylie Stretton and Rachel Hay, presented statistics, case studies and recommendations around the huge range of connection issues that rural Australians face, to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network in Townsville last Friday.

"The structure for nbn-to-customer delivery is fundamentally flawed – we liken the setup to a driverless train with a series of carriages that are poorly identified and incredibly difficult for the customer to access and use," said BIRRR's chief admin Kristy Sparrow.
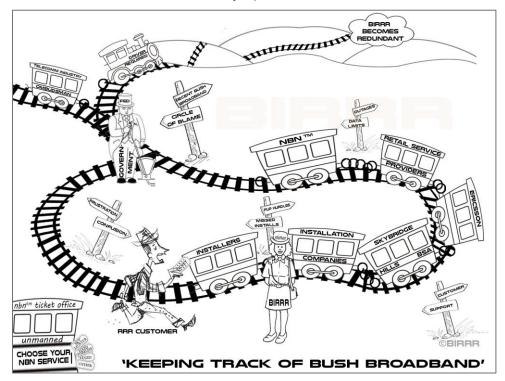

Figure 1: BIRRR cartoon showing why Bush Broadband is NOT on track!

BIRRR co-founder Kylie Stretton explained the current situation to the Senate public hearing.

"Sometimes (customers) are unaware of their options, because there are so many people involved… whether they should contact their retail service provider, nbn, or an installer?

"Sometimes they have not contacted anyone, because they are really confused… there are so many carriages to this train and not one clear driver - it is very confusing.

"(BIRRR) is often contacted as the last resort - people feel like they have nowhere else to go."

The ever-growing number of services on which businesses and households are dependent (e.g ATO, education and health portals) make digital access vital, regardless of postcode. Data limits on unreliable connections in RRR Australia contrast sharply with rising urban download rates (with average Australian download on **nbn** services now 144GB/month and Sky Muster satellite customers limited to less than half of that 'on peak' for *both* upload and download).

"Every Australian, irrespective of where they live or work, must be confident they can connect to quality, reliable, accessible and affordable broadband and voice services. Customer support guarantees *must* be underpinned with commitments by nbn, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and government, to ensure that RRR areas are not disadvantaged due to their population and postcode," Ms Sparrow said.

A 97-page submission included a comprehensive list of issues faced by end users, including:
- **nbn^TM mapping, location & addressing issues**
- **Lack of accessible information on standard and non-standard nbn^TM Fixed Wireless installs from nbn^TM.**
- **nbn^TM installer & delivery partner issues**
- **Cancelled installs and services not activating on install**
- **Inferior technology of nbn^TM roll out for some regional locations**
- **The complexity of nbn^TM network.**

In finding causes for the complex issues rural Australia deals with, BIRRR identified:
1. The **Government Statement of Expectations** (August, 2016) does not provide nbn^TM with a **clear mandate on customer service obligations, service quality and reliability** or **technology choice.**
2. **nbn^TM** is **not transparent and accountable** when it comes to providing information and support to both **providers and end users** regarding their **Sky Muster and Fixed Wireless Services**.
3. **nbn^TM Sky Muster satellite wholesale service** does **not allow retail service providers** to **supply services that meet the needs of end users**. Sky Muster's platform limits productivity and innovation, and **fails to fully deliver social and economic benefits for rural, regional and remote Australians.**

The group found that **lack of business data plans offered for Sky Muster services,** along with nbn^TM brand damage, have impacted the take-up of nbn^TM services generally.

BIRRR also recommended a more comprehensive approach over multiple separate government investigations into broadband and telecommunications issues**.**

"We have spent hundreds of volunteer hours, preparing three comprehensive submissions already this year – we need government to address the issue urgently and use the mountain of information they already have to do so," said Ms Sparrow.

"Our main aim (in founding this group) was to be an advocacy and information group – but we are instead tied up with specific troubleshooting and support services for rural families and businesses living in the ongoing grip of the Data Drought. Other essential service providers (such as power and water providers) manage to do their own troubleshooting of issues, and do not expect a volunteer group to do it for them," Ms Stretton told the Senate committee hearing.

 "(BIRRR admins) run farms, businesses, have jobs, study and kids. BIRRR continues to help troubleshoot on average 200 calls for help each week, put in more than 10,000 volunteer hours (over 900 days) fighting the data drought with limited, unreliable and costly internet of our own.

"BIRRR's ambition – to become redundant - feels like a very distant dream."

For further information:
BIRRR Website: www.birrraus.com (full submission link)
BIRRR Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/BIRRR/
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