

BETTER INTERNET FOR RURAL REGIONAL & REMOTE AUSTRALIA

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BIRRR IN CANBERRA!

The Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) team travelled to Canberra this week to bring regional and remote bush communications issues to the decision-makers during a series of face-to-face meetings today.

The far-flung team gathered in the nation's capital to discuss bush broadband and voice service accessibility, reliability and affordability issues along with customer service guarantees, with government and telecommunications stakeholders.

The group had wall-to-wall meetings at Parliament House today, in the lead-up to the annual Isolated CHildren's Parents' Association (ICPA) Federal Conference in Canberra.*

"BIRRR will be seeking assurances from both sides of government that there will be a commitment to funding digital literacy services and independent communication advisory and support hubs for rural and remote Australia," said BIRRR's co-founder Kristy Sparrow.

The team will also meet with nbn and Telstra regional teams to discuss ways to improve customer service and regional connections. The trip has also provided the perfect opportunity to present the Universal Services Obligation Taskforce Committee with the results of BIRRR's latest survey, which highlights the current state of bush voice services and addresses future concerns.

The group referred to the numerous enquiries, reference groups and research that they have already undertaken over the past four years.

"We will be talking and presenting our research, but what we need from all stakeholders is action."

"The very reason for the creation of the BIRRR group was the lack information and support for bush telecommunications - and our role has expanded because there continues to be a lack of independent advice, support and information in this space.

"The BIRRR team has given hundreds of volunteer hours over the past four years, troubleshooting and helping out with practical advice and tailored information for end-users.

"We have also spent endless hours working on submissions to various committees and undertaken multiple surveys across rural, regional and remote Australia," Mrs Sparrow explained.

"We have unintentionally ended up in these roles - we volunteered as advocates, not as information hub providers, data collectors or troubleshooters.

The messages BIRRR shared with each stakeholder in Canberra today, and have presented previously to each committee through submissions, are consistent:

- Every Australian, irrespective of where they live or work, should be confident they can access quality, reliable, accessible & affordable voice and broadband services
- Providers must offer customer support guarantees.
- An independent, overarching hub to take over the troubleshooting and general advice roles currently taken on by BIRRR must be set up by government.

“BIRRR urges the government and telecommunication stakeholders to acknowledge that now is the time to be proactive and solve the telecommunications issues raised in these reports, with a serious commitment to actually begin bridging the digital divide, rather than watching it grow wider.’

The BIRRR admin team is made up of six volunteers - Kristy Sparrow, Kylie Stretton, Kristen Coggan, Amanda Salisbury, Julie Stott and Claire Butler. All are rural women who have dedicated their time and skills to ensure RRR telecommunications issues are recognised and are resolved.

This is the first time BIRRR’s five founding members have actually all met face-to-face in the four years since the group was created - with their geographic locations scattered from Charters Towers in North Queensland to Oberon in southern NSW.

The BIRRR team would like to acknowledge the incredible support of BIRRR’s 11,000 members, especially those who contributed to crowdfunding (including generous donations from CWA NSW) that has supported rural telecommunications advocacy efforts over the past 24 months.

*BIRRRR will also be presenting on the topic of Effective Advocacy at the ICPA conference on Thursday.

For further information:

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