

BIRRR

BETTER
INTERNET FOR
RURAL,
REGIONAL & 
REMOTE AUSTRALIA



MEMBER

REPORT

This report gives an overview of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR), the organisations activities, achievements, goals, and future direction.

2023





15,250
ACTIVELY ENGAGED
MEMBERS

OUR STORY SO FAR

HOW BIRRR BEGAN?

Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) began as a Facebook group in October 2014. Kylie Stretton (Charters Towers, QLD) and Kristy Sparrow (Alpha, QLD) set up the group when they were struggling to get sufficient speeds and enough data at affordable prices to educate their children, run their businesses and participate in an increasingly digital society.

The group grew quickly and in 2015 we added a resource website. Along the way we have built a community of trusted members and become one of few grassroots, independent advocates in the regional telecommunications space. Our 15,250 members come from all Australian states and territories, use

all types of connectivity options and have very individual and different needs, budgets and knowledge. From individuals, to small and big business, local governments, industry, media + more BIRRR has become a voice for

#betterbushcomms

WHO IS BIRRR?

BIRRR is a not-for-profit, technology agnostic, apolitical and independent volunteer support, advisory and advocacy group for rural, regional and remote telecommunications.

BIRRR is made up of volunteer admin and a network of volunteer data analysts, technical advisors, website designers, submission writers and a variety of members who have devoted time and resources to assist in advocating for improvements to regional connectivity. We are an online, supportive community with in-depth knowledge and experience in regional telecommunications.

OUR TIMELINE

2014

- BIRRR Facebook Group was created

- BIRRR Website was created
- Developed a desk check process
- Telstra un-meter education sites on mobile broadband
- BIRRR's Regional Internet Access Survey
- BIRRR featured on ABC Landline

2015

- nbn Sky Muster becomes available
- BIRRR's nbn Sky Muster Survey
- Crowdfunded to support our advocacy
- Founding member RRRCC
- nbn Sky Muster Education Port

2016

- BIRRR hit 10,000 members
- nbn Sky Muster Double Data
- Recorded outage message on nbn hotline

2017

- BIRRR's Landline and Connectivity Survey
- Kylie Stretton appointed to RTIRC
- Dedicated regional escalation team at Telstra

2018

- Round 4 MBSP focus on remote schools
- nbn outage website launched
- Version 1 nbn Sky Muster Plus
- RCP Program - place based solutions
- AVST Trials Working Group

2019

- Telstra introduce SMS over WiFi
- nbn Sky Muster Plus 2.0
- Regional Tech Hub was announced

2020

- Kristy Sparrow appointed to RTIRC
- BIRRR Review Survey of nbn Sky Muster RSPs
- Connectivity Literacy was coined.

2021

2022

- nbn fixed wireless and satellite upgrades announced
- nbn Sky Muster Plus 3.0

- nbn Sky Muster Plus Premium 4.0 - completely unlimited launched
- Regional Tech Hub re-funded for a further 3 years
- LIDIF Forum established

2023

2024

- BIRRR hits 10 year milestone

CONNECTIVITY LITERACY

During the preparation of numerous submissions, engagement with the telecommunications industry, stakeholders and our members and research backed by JCU, we quickly came to realise, that through no fault of their own, but rather a long list of barriers, historic factors, and too much emphasis placed on consumer knowledge, regional Australians were not connectivity literate. **In 2021, we coined the terminology "Connectivity Literacy".**

WHAT IS Connectivity Literacy?



Connectivity Literacy is all of the knowledge needed by a consumer to understand how to get & stay connected to equitable, affordable & reliable voice & broadband services that meet their needs & budgets. The Australian telecommunications industry places a large emphasis on consumers having this knowledge, however there is little independent support & education available to assist consumers.

CHOOSING A TECHNOLOGY



How to find the range of technologies that may be available at a residence or business, including satellite, fixed wireless, mobile broadband or fibre. Choosing which technology meets a consumers' needs, wants & budget & knowing how to get connected to that technology.

CHOOSING A PROVIDER



How to find & choose a provider that offers the chosen technology & can support a consumer in staying connected. Understanding payment methods, how to contact a provider & using provider apps & dashboards.

CHOOSING A PLAN



Navigating through a wide range of plans, data allowances, speed tiers & add-ons. Understanding CIS documents, contracts & terminologies & the intricacies of what is included in a connection plan. Finding an affordable plan.

SELECTING & UPGRADING EQUIPMENT



Selecting, updating & configuring connectivity equipment, such as routers, mesh systems & P2P. Knowing how to improve wi-fi coverage, choose headsets & cameras to improve video-conferencing, telehealth & education lessons.

TROUBLESHOOTING A CONNECTION



Knowing how to identify & report a fault or degraded connection. What to do when you have connection issues & how to solve problems such as drop outs, slow speeds, buffering, poor wi-fi & other performance issues. How to get issues escalated.

Connectivity Literacy has no demographic barriers, it is **the core foundation to Digital Inclusion**, yet attracts little funding or research. Connectivity Literacy affects the outcomes of all Government infrastructure & research programs. Yet, through no fault of their own, many consumers, businesses, local Government & industries struggle to get & stay connected to the best service for their needs

WHAT IS Digital Literacy?



Digital literacy is all of the skills and knowledge needed by a consumer to use technology, navigate various digital platforms, understand and communicate through them.

Digital literacy is well researched through the ADII. The ADII measures digital inclusion through three dimensions of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability, however it does not address Connectivity Literacy barriers.

TO HAVE DIGITAL INCLUSION

Rural, Regional & Remote Australian consumers & businesses, all levels of Government & industry must be able to access and understand

3 ESSENTIAL FACTORS



1. INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to quality, reliable & affordable connectivity **Infrastructure** that best suits an individuals' needs & budget.

2. CONNECTIVITY LITERACY

Knowing how to get connected & stay connected.



3. DIGITAL LITERACY

Knowing how to use a connection, platforms, software & devices.





WHAT WE DO

BIRRR works with providers, industry and stakeholders across the Australian telecommunication industry, as well as government departments, other regional advocates, researchers, the media, technical advisors and our members. Our advocacy focus is on addressing the barriers that have created a growing Connectivity Literacy gap that exists in the RRR telecommunications space and on ensuring:

every Australian, irrespective of where they live, can be confident they have the knowledge and infrastructure to access quality, reliable, affordable and equitable voice and broadband services with stringent consumer support guarantees.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

BIRRR Admin have represented our members on a variety of working groups, committees, forums and presented at conferences including:

- Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition since 2016
- Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) Conference, 2016
- Broadband for the Bush Forum, 2016 + 2017
- Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) 2018 and 2021
- GROWAg Summit 2016 + National Farmers Federation Congress, 2016
- Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network (QRRRW) 2016 and 2017
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) Federal Conference, 2018
- Alternate Voice Service Trials 2021/2022 + LEO SAT Working Group 2023
- AgForce Telecommunications and Social Policy Working Group
- ICPA QLD Conference, 2016
- ACCC Regional Mobile Issues Forum, 2018
- Leading Sheep Forum, 2019
- BEEF Australia, 2021
- ICPA SA Conference, 2019
- RAI - Regions Rising Conference 2021
- Low Income Digital Inclusion Forum (LIDIF) 2023
- ACCC Regulatory Conference 2023
- Regional Tech Hub Advisory Committee
- nbn RRR Roundtables participant
- Developing Northern Australia Conferences



WHO WE'VE MET WITH

TELCO & INDUSTRY

nbn, Telstra, Aussie Broadband, SkyMesh, Optus, IPSTAR, Activ8me, TPG/Vodafone, Southern Phone, Vocus, Field Solutions Group, Installers Near Me, ANT Communications, SpaceX, Pivotal, Nokia, Viasat, Various Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs), Queensland Capacity Network



GOVERNMENT & REPRESENTATIVES

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), Regional Development Australia, various Local Governments, various Regions of Councils, Business Chamber Queensland, Queensland State Government, Federal Government, QLD Department Agriculture and Fisheries, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, First Nations Digital Inclusion Working Group and Drought Hubs

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), Isolated Children's Parent's Association (ICPA), Regional Tech Hub (RTH), Country Women's Association NSW (CWA), Country Universities Centres, Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network Inc. (QRRRW), Central Highlands Development Corporation (CHDC), Beef Week, LYNK, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA), AgForce, JCU, QUT, Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), Queensland Farmers Federation, Australia Post, Connected Farms, Zetifi, AgCloud, various ag-tech providers



+ MANY MORE

9 YEARS ON

HOW OUR NUMBERS LOOK

578,000+

**WEBSITE
HITS**

17

**SUBMISSIONS
AND REPORTS**

4

**LARGE SCALE
BUSH
COMMS
SURVEYS**

1071

**WISP
TOWERS
MAPPED**

**All you
need
is wifi
and a
dream.**

9

**TRIPS TO
CANBERRA
AND SYDNEY**

60,000+

**UNPAID
VOLUNTEER
HOURS**

THOUSANDS

**OF PHONE
CALLS AND
VIDEO
CONFERENCES**

15,250+

**FACEBOOK
GROUP
MEMBERS**

1

**REGIONAL TECH HUB (RTH)
ADVOCATED FOR, FUNDED
AND NOW OPERATIONAL**

1 WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY PLAN / ROADMAP

Encourage different levels of government (Federal, state, local) to work together with Telcos, RRR stakeholders, and industry:

- Develop a comprehensive regional connectivity plan and roadmap that is forward-thinking, place based and encompasses future needs and growth of regional communities.
- Ensure funded solutions meet the needs of RRR communities and consumers are supported in getting and staying connected

2 IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY LITERACY

Work with industry, regulatory bodies and other RRR stakeholders to:

- Improve the quality and distribution of accurate Connectivity Literacy information to RRR consumers, businesses, industry and local Governments to ensure RRR consumers don't have to be connectivity experts. Ensure products and plans are accessible and equipment is plug and play, with fewer expectations placed on the consumer.
- Place greater emphasis on identifying misinformation and disinformation.
- Ensure sectors such as health, agriculture, business, education, industry, first nations communities and local governments are supported in getting and staying connected.

3 IMPROVE CONSUMER GUARANTEES AND TELCO ACCOUNTABILITY

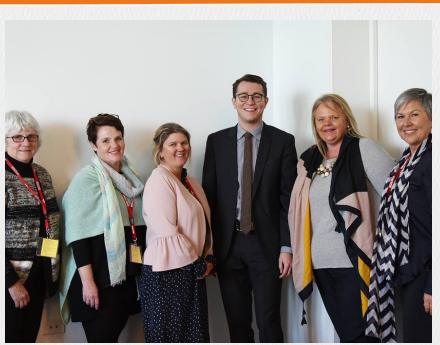
Advocate to ensure that telcos are held accountable and RRR consumers can get problems resolved and are aware of their rights.

- Encourage urgent improvements to RRR telecommunications fault reporting, rectification and consumer protection guarantees
- Ensure there are clear standards, targets, and accountability in regards to connection and repair times, performance levels, reliability and safety nets for RRR consumers for both voice and broadband.

4 IMPROVE CAPACITY, COVERAGE, RESILIENCY AND AFFORDABILITY OF REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Work with telcos, industry and government to:

- Ensure technologies used for voice and broadband are fit for purpose, reliable, affordable, resilient and designed to cope with the demand, terrain and weather conditions of RRR users.
- Advocate for upgrades to improve capacity and coverage of RRR networks.





THE FUTURE

Telecommunications is a fast changing landscape, there will always be a need for grass roots advocacy and a voice representing the bush. BIRRR is wholly reliant on the generosity of its members, their skill, time and voluntary contributions keep the lights on. This has allowed BIRRR to remain independent, technologically agnostic and apolitical. It's also why our members should be the drivers of change.

Moving into our second decade is an opportunity to BIRRR to refresh its vision, operational structure and map a path for its next decade. Our aim is to remain relevant, aspirational, effective and sustainable well into the future.

Strategic Plan 2025-35

Member Consultation - Stakeholder Consultation - Volunteer Drive - Strategic Planning Sessions - Draft Plan Consultation - Development and Enactment of the new Strategic Plan and Activities

"We will continue to be a voice for rural, regional and remote consumers and strive for continual improvements, both for bush connectivity and for our own organisation."

BIRRR co-founder Kristy Sparrow



Regional Internet Technology Types



**nbn
FIXED
LINE**



**nbn
FIXED
WIRELESS**



**nbn
SATELLITE
Sky
Muster**



**WISP
non-nbn
FIXED
WIRELESS**



**Starlink
SATELLITE**



**ADSL,
non-nbn
FIBRE and
CABLE**



**MOBILE
BROADBAND**

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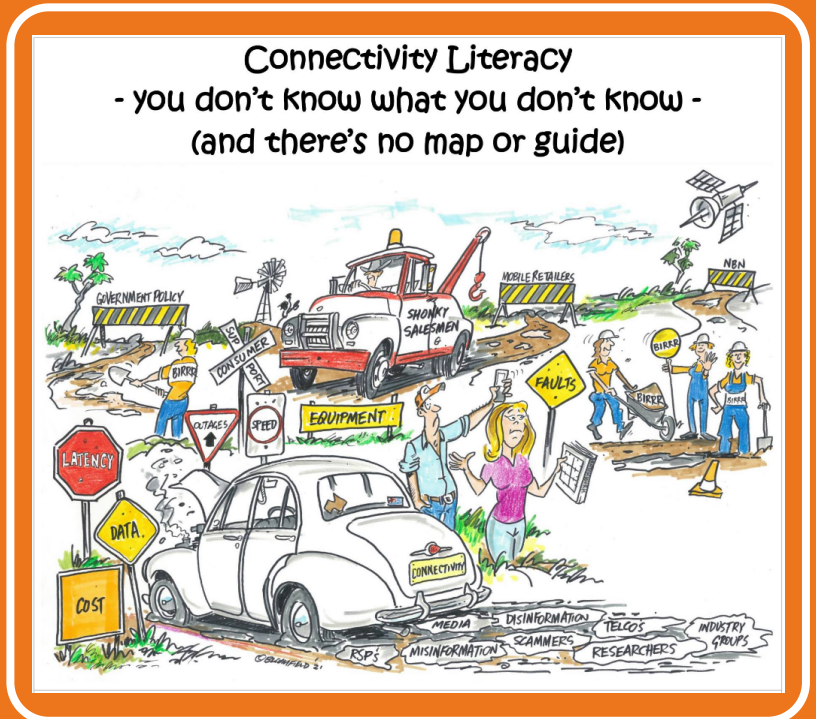
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Connectivity Literacy Cartoon
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WE THANK
OUR MEMBERS FOR THEIR
CONTINUED SUPPORT
AND THE TELCO INDUSTRY
FOR ALLOWING US A
SEAT AT THE TABLE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Please get in touch if you can volunteer some time to assist - we need a range of volunteers to help with media, submissions, website, Facebook group admin + more. All assistance is gratefully appreciated.