# Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the residents of Imangara, Kwale Kwale and Mungalawurru communities in the Northern Territory for sharing their time and knowledge with us, and for their active involvement in what they referred to as ‘the computer project’.

*Internet on the Outstation* is the result of a multi-year collaboration between the Swinburne Institute for Social Research, the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), the Central Land Council (CLC), and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). Ellie Rennie, Eleanor Hogan and Julian Thomas were all based at Swinburne when the research and writing for this book occurred. Andrew Crouch and Robin Gregory were working at CAT, and Alyson Wright was working for the CLC.

CAT is an Aboriginal not-for-profit organization that works towards sustainable livelihoods for those living in remote communities, and conducts research into, and development of, appropriate technologies. CAT was formed in the 1980s when the outstation movement was gaining momentum, and much of its work today is still focused on small remote communities, known as ‘outstations’. In CAT’s definition, appropriate technologies meet the economic, cultural, environmental and social needs of the people, and design and development occurs through consultation and collaboration with communities. In his history of CAT, Alan Mayne writes that CAT’s ‘appropriate technologies’, ‘together with the research and design process that produces them, their regular servicing and the training and education programmes that inform their use, are making a difference in communities throughout remote Australia’.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The CLC is a statutory body set up under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT). The CLC’s history is deeply imbued with Aboriginal justice, recognition and the fight for land rights. The primary functions of the CLC are to help traditional landowners in the management of their country in the southern half of the Northern Territory. Through advocacy and policy work, the ninety-member Council also represents the interests, rights and concerns of Aboriginal people across regions.

The CLC believes that the provision of access to communication technologies is an essential service in remote communities. The focus of much of their work in this area has been on addressing disadvantages in service and access levels for remote residents, affordability issues, rights to service and increasing the choice of communication options for remote communities. The CLC remains concerned about the future of small remote communities in Central Australia because of a lack of funding commitment from both levels of government, and an increasing move to prioritize larger communities when allocating funding. This is despite a robust determination of traditional owners to remain living on or near their country.

ACCAN is Australia’s peak body for consumer representation in communications, spanning residential consumers and small businesses, including not-for profit organizations, insofar as they are consumers. ACCAN assists people to make good choices about products and services, and makes representations to policy makers and industry on behalf of its broad and diverse membership.

The Swinburne Institute for Social Research is located within Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne. A core group of researchers within the Institute is looking at digital transformations, and how they are impacting on Australia’s economy, social inclusion, cultural policy, health and wellbeing. The Institute is also a node of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), led by Stuart Cunningham, and our research in Central Australia was conducted as part of CCI’s wider research program on the social, economic and cultural dimensions of broadband services.

A number of people from each of these organizations provided additional assistance during the project. Thanks are due to Ruth Elvin for her encouragement and advice during her time at CAT; Julian Cleary and Peter Donohoe from CLC for stepping in during Alyson’s maternity leave; Robin McNaughton, Michael Charlton, Teresa Corbin, Una Lawrence and Ryan Sengara from ACCAN for their contributions; and Jake Goldenfein from Swinburne for assisting us during the Papunya research fieldwork, and for collaborating on research into the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER; known as ‘the Intervention’).

The research was funded in three phases. ACCAN’s Grants Scheme funded the first phase of the project (the ‘baseline study’) in 2010. As the peak consumer representation body in communications, ACCAN awards grants each year for research and advocacy projects that align with its goal of available, accessible and affordable communications for all Australians. We are very grateful to ACCAN for kickstarting this research, and for continuing on the project after that grant concluded. CCI’s support, especially in the early stages of the work, was also critical.

The Aboriginals Benefit Account funded the hardware, maintenance and training components of the project. As described in the book, CAT led the technical and training aspects of the work, and undertook regular visits to the communities to provide them with assistance.

The data collection for the social research (2011-2014) was funded through an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant. In addition to the ARC funding, each organization contributed substantial in-kind time. In particular, CAT provided Andrew’s time, CLC provided Alyson’s time (and car), and Swinburne contributed Ellie and Julian’s time. The Swinburne research team also received a grant from Google Australia, which enabled us to do additional work on the NTER legislation and its implications for publicly-funded computers.

During the course of the project, we conducted research in two larger communities. We would like to thank the people of Ali Curung and Papunya for allowing us to carry out this work. In particular, we thank Jessie Simpson and Roseanne Holmes, who worked with Ellie and Alyson to administer the Ali Curung survey, and provided invaluable cultural advice regarding questions to be included. Derek Walker assisted Peter Donohoe with the ‘men’s side’ of the Ali Curung survey. We are grateful to both of them for helping rectify the gender imbalance in our original survey results. We also thank Sammy Butcher at Papunya for his support of the study; Ashton Kealy, Mary McMullen, Rebecca Smith and Ryan Raggatt for their assistance in the computer room; and Jenny and Blair McFarland at the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) for providing ongoing information about ICT arrangements in the MacDonnell region.

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Broadband for the Bush (B4B) emerged as a key forum for us to discuss our findings over the course of the project, and to make connections with other organizations working on similar issues. We thank the members of B4B for their committed advocacy and policy development work, and for bringing the communication needs of Indigenous people living in remote areas to the attention of policymakers and telcos.

Finally, the genesis of this work was a conversation between two old friends in 2009: Julian Thomas, Director of the Swinburne Institute for Social Research, and the late Peter Taylor when he was CEO of CAT. Ellie Rennie (who was living in Alice Springs and working for the Swinburne Institute) was introduced to CAT through that connection, and began to explore the issue of the digital divide with Andrew Crouch in 2009. The project would not have happened if it were not for Peter’s passion for communications and his deep knowledge of the circumstances of remote communities. His sudden death in 2013 was a great loss for central Australia.

Sections of this book have been adapted from our own prior publications: the opening anecdote comes from an *Inside Story* article.[[2]](#footnote-3) Part of the cyber safety discussion in Chapter 5 was also published in *Inside Story*.[[3]](#footnote-4) The discussion of gender in Chapter 7 appears in *Australian Aboriginal Studies*.[[4]](#footnote-5) We published the findings from the baseline study in *Telecommunications Policy*, and the findings from the 2009 computer center survey (discussed in Chapter 1) in *Communication Politics and Culture*.[[5]](#footnote-6)

1. A. Mayne, *Alternative Interventions: Aboriginal homelands, outback Australia and the Centre for Appropriate Technology*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2014, p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. E. Rennie, ‘Internet on the Outstation’, *Inside Story,* 9 May 2011, http://insidestory.org.au/internet-on-the-outstation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. E. Hogan, ‘Beyond the Mulga Curtain’, 11 July, 2014, *Inside Story,* http://insidestory.org.au/behind-the-mulga-curtain. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. E. Hogan, Gender and ICT access in remote central Australian Aboriginal contexts,

   *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2016.1 (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. E. Rennie, A. Crouch, A. Wright and J. Thomas, ‘At Home on the Outstation: Barriers to Home Internet in Remote Indigenous Communities’, *Communication, Politics and Culture,* 43.1 (2013): 48-69.

   E. Rennie, A. Crouch, J. Thomas and P. Taylor, ‘Beyond Public Access? Reconsidering Broadband for Remote Indigenous Communities’, *Communication, Politics and Culture*, 43.1 (2010): 583–593. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)