



CEO / Executive Director Report

By all accounts, since its launch in 1996 our organisation has frequently been through periods of great internal reflection. That's code for not having had a unified view at board level regarding what should be done and/or how it should be done. Such is the case right now.

From the moment I joined as CEO back in 2014 it was clear the board was divided – between those who had embraced the need for a new strategic direction and those who seemingly preferred things back when the organisation was operating more as a "club for geeks" (their definition, not mine).

One thing that was agreed was we needed #BetterBroadband. Back then the official policy favoured a return to a full-fibre NBN. Approximately two years ago we began calling for the adoption of FTTdp as a plausible interim option. At that time neither the Government nor the Opposition had embraced this new technology. Fast forward to today and NBN Co has begun moving to FTTdp, although more by stealth than with an admission that FTTN is not working out as they had expected. The ALP is likewise showing signs of a move in the same direction.

We have hopefully played a positive role in increasing the debate about the needs of a digitally-enabled future. I'm incredibly proud of the impact we've had highlighting the importance of a future-proofed 21st Century NBN. At every stage over the past three years I've been buoyed by the supportive feedback received from IA members and the general public and been guided by the member survey that overwhelmingly opposed the deployment of FTTN.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, we have acquired some critics. In case, like me, you don't normally read Communications Day, you might not have noticed that editor/publisher Grahame Lynch has been particularly relentless in his attacks on IA. Sadly, with what looks suspiciously like the assistance of people close to us, The Australian has weighed in too of late. For my part, while it is distressing to be attacked for doing one's job, in part at least I wear these attacks as a badge of honour and proof that what we've achieved is worth acknowledging.

While the state of the NBN has been a primary focus it is not the only issue we have actively addressed. Along with the Communications Alliance we did our best to highlight the flaws in the data retention scheme. Our submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security last year was instrumental in a range of improvements to this legislation and, most importantly, the requirement for a three year review, which is timed for 2018.

I was particularly proud to have been appointed a GoDigi Champion and to work with InfoXchange and others on 2017 the National Year of Digital Inclusion. This is a theme that we have continued to support in our work on behalf of everyone who uses the Internet.

One issue that is still a work-in-progress is in relation to so-called Internet "piracy", or as we've preferred to call it the unlawful downloading of copyrighted material. We've regularly pointed out that internationally there's little evidence site-blocking actually works. The matter will require more attention given this month's release of federal government draft regulations requiring the development of a voluntarily code for online access to copyright content.

We have declared Internet Security a top priority for this year and will be announcing soon an initiative in collaboration with ISOC and MIT.

By far the biggest challenge over the past three years has been a lack of resources. We set out to recruit new organisational members, however the regular response was that they were already paying too many industry related groups. We looked at the prospect of government funding but found that other organisations were already ahead of us on that score. This year we were plagued with a technical snafu regarding the renewals process for individual members that saw a large number accidentally leave us. This problem is being addressed and our ranks are slowly regrowing.

However, looking at the long history of ISOC-AU, and that of the 100+ other ISOC chapters, it is my view that we were altogether too ambitious and a future board may be best advised to adopt an action plan based primarily, if not entirely, on volunteers.

Finally, having now served on or reported to a range of NFP boards, I have formed some clear views on how to make them work best. Top of this list is the need for ongoing, programmed board renewal. Over the past few years a number of directors have retired after what by modern governance standards were some a very long stints. My recommendation to the members and the new board is revise the constitution to bring in fixed term limits. I'd also suggest some form of board skills assessment be undertaken, along with a requirement for board members to demonstrate formal governance training or agree to undergo governance training early in their term.



Chair Report

George Fong and Laurie Patton announced to a board meeting on 24 August that they would not be standing for re-election. Shortly after that I advised the other directors that I too would not seeking re-election. In addition to us three, Chris Disspain and Chris Winter also advised they would be stepping down

In my case I am leaving because I didn't join IA to spend inordinate amounts of time defending myself and the organisation against baseless attacks from people who clearly have questionable agendas or are pushing someone else's barrow

As Laurie has noted in his report, the board is currently divided. I'm not sure if the membership is too, but I do believe that we need to put an end to the division and in the process answer some fundamental question

The then ISOC-AU Board, under the incredible leadership of George Fong as president, decided long before I arrived to revitalise the organisation and to advocate vigorously for a 21st Century NBN. Without George's vision and commitment, IA would likely still be a largely invisible and silent organisation

The question to be dealt with now is what is to be the purpose of IA in future. There will be at least five new board members so we should see some new ideas or at least fresh thinking on the prevailing issues.

Our parent organisation is moving further ahead in its global work to shape the future with a recently launched "next-gen" website. IA risks falling out of line with our parent organisation if we revert to the old ways, as some would seem to prefer.

I support Laurie's call for a review of the constitution and in particular the need to ensure ongoing board renewal through term limits.

While I'm leaving the IA board I am not resiling from my commitment to work for the broadband infrastructure that will see Australia rise up the ladder of global connectivity and open up all the opportunities of the digitally-enabled economy that other countries are harnessing way before us.

I wish the new board well in its endeavours and simply remind them that we are, after all, a chapter of the global Internet Society whose guiding principle is the Internet is for Everyone.