

# Submission

by



**COUTTS  
COMMUNICATIONS**

*Mobility Matters*

to the

Backing Indigenous Ability (BIA) – Telecommunications Package  
DCITA BIA Discussion Paper of March 2006

## 1. Introduction

Coutts Communications Pty Ltd [www.couttscommunications.com](http://www.couttscommunications.com) is a specialist business/policy consultancy business in telecommunications and its principal Professor Reg Coutts is an Emeritus Professor of Telecommunications at the University of Adelaide in South Australia.

Professor Reg Coutts has been recently retained (April 2006) by the Institute of Telecommunications Research (ITR) [www.itr.unisa.edu.au](http://www.itr.unisa.edu.au) of the University of South Australia on behalf of the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK CRC) [www.desertknowledge.com/crc](http://www.desertknowledge.com/crc). His task is to assist the development of a Supplementary Bid in Rural and remote Telecommunications to the CRC program [www.crc.gov.au/Information/default.aspx](http://www.crc.gov.au/Information/default.aspx). A key role of this engagement is to engage commercial partners such as the new telecommunication service providers focused on rural market opportunities to partner with DK CRC in its bid. It is noted that many of these new carriers have been stimulated by the whole Connect Australia initiative.

As stated in its submission (Ref 1) to the BIA paper “the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre is committed to creating economic opportunities for desert people, and to making a demonstrable difference for remote indigenous communities, through the application of excellent research and training.” ITR a Core Partner of the DK CRC and its submission (Ref 2) to the BIA paper specifically refers proposed CRC Supplementary bid in remote telecommunications. will be very outcomes oriented directed at how innovations in telecommunications can better enable this broad objective.

## 2. A Strategy for *Sustainable Telecommunications Innovation*

The key focus for this submission is to inform the design of the program to develop a sustainable environment for ongoing innovation in telecommunications to meet the emerging and changing needs of indigenous communities.

The achievement of this objective with respect to Telecommunications for rural and remote residents including indigenous people has alluded Australian Governments over many decades. The use of successive regulatory interventions such as the Universal Service Obligation (USO) policy, specific Telstra licence conditions and other measures have assured a modicum of 'basic telephone service'. However, the Connect Australia policy initiative, the associated funding arising out of the sale of Telstra and the emergence of a plethora of lower cost enabling technologies (eg VoIP and broadband wireless) provide a once in a life time opportunity to set in place a new 'eco-system' of innovation and competitive supply.

By way of an overseas bench-mark, Canada has had a similar difficulty providing adequate telecommunications (and broadcasting) services to its Northern citizens and particularly to its First Nation peoples. My recent participation in APEC TEL in Calgary Canada at a Workshop entitled : "Broadband Access for Remote and Indigenous Communities"

<http://emc2.onware.ca:80/prothos/onware.x/conf/000000205/documents/index.p?!=public=11486045407043=1=26602153&Type=BB> gave me an update on how a new collaborative model might work. Emerging technologies can be developed to meet evolving different community needs, scaled through a national / provincial government initiatives in partnership with the private sector. An illustration of the evolving infrastructure to provide sustainable business models for the delivery of services is discussed in a number of the presentations available on the APEC TEL33 site.

An important element in the Canadian example currently absent in Australia but active<sup>1</sup> in Canada is a credible competitor to the incumbent and USO provider Telstra. In other words for such a new model to be sustainable there has to be a business imperative for the private sector telecommunications service providers. The emergence of AUSalliance which brings together a number of significant players who who have been stimulated to some degree by the Connect Australia initiative is still at an early phase. The other important element in the Canadian example is the 'eco system of innovation' bringing together researchers with innovative communities wanting to live 'on the land' but engage with the rest of the nation and the world. In the case of Australia the Desert Knowledge CRC with the enhanced focus on Remote Telecommunications can potentially provide that essential element.

In many respects compared to Canadian model with respect to technology innovation, the Australian the collaborative model of an Incorporated CRC with commercial telecommunications provider partners<sup>2</sup> has advantages. The enhanced DK CRC will be supported by mining companies<sup>3</sup>, remote communities and researchers<sup>4</sup> and is preferable for achieving collaborative partnership in developing innovative solutions. My recent paper presented in the UK 'Understanding the User within the Innovation

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<sup>1</sup> Telesat has emerged a significant global player in telecommunications and is certainly an important competitor to Telecom Canada in rural markets.

<sup>2</sup> There has been only exploratory discussion at this stage in regard to support by various telecommunications companies partnering with DK CRC in its bid

<sup>3</sup> Both BHP Billeton and Newmont are currently partners in the DK CRC

<sup>4</sup> Both the University of Wollongong and the University of South Australia have significant research capabilities in these emerging telecommunications technologies

Spiral.’ [Ref 4] provides the innovation framework that we have in mind for the way the DK CRC could work with indigenous communities and telecommunications providers. For example new technological products (eg VoIP phones) could be introduced in a pilot community group, the take up and usage (ie ‘degree of technology appropriation’ would be monitored and this would inform further development leading to final deployment. This process of regular, ongoing evaluation of the changing user behaviour around the technology couples with the ever changing technology capabilities can lead in some instances to *a spiral of innovation* characteristic of successful commercial service products. The innovation Marvin<sup>TM</sup> described in Attachment 2 provides an indicator of the sort of spiral that is possible leading to work and business opportunities for all the parties. A key requirement often missed is the need of the innovation evolution framework to co-develop sustainable business models for all the parties to continue to benefit from the collaboration.

A key opportunity for indigenous communities made possible with better broadband telecommunications infrastructure is the delivery of better health care services. For example an ICT enabled collaborative model promising to deliver health benefits in rural and remote communities was presented by Brian Richards of Health Connect [Ref 13] at the recent Regional Conference in Canberra. It should be noted that while important telecommunications is only a part of the infrastructure required. It is an illustrative model on which to build to include ongoing innovation in service delivery in the framework discussed above.

This strategy is an outline of how the Desert Knowledge CRC might partner with DCITA in an ongoing way particularly from 2007 assuming the success of the new Remote Telecommunications initiative to sustain an innovative environment “creating economic opportunities for desert people, and to making a demonstrable difference for remote Indigenous communities” consistent with their mission.

### **3. Potential Assistance to the BIA by Coutts Communications**

As stated above, Coutts Communications is assisting the DK CRC to bid for a Supplementary CRC bid in Remote Telecommunications where our role is to engage key telecommunications players to become commercial collaborative partners with the DK CRC. These include suppliers (eg Motorola who supply rural broadband wireless equipment), rural focused carriers / ISPs (eg AUSalliance members) and governments but discussions are at an early phase.

However, Coutts Communications would like to contribute in its own right to help shape and contribute to the BIA program based on our:

- In depth knowledge and experience of the telecommunications, research and the government sectors. Professor Coutts has a career history spanning / bridging both industry and university based research in telecommunications. His experience includes policy & regulatory issues, infrastructure, service delivery to strategic / business planning
- Strong collaborative networks within all sectors of the ICT industry, with research institutions, government and including small business
- A focus on experientially based problem solving and innovation and sustainability or focus on collaborative problem solving and innovation in context of user

- Proven ability to uncover user or community solutions and then achieve economies of scale through market dimensioning to build sustainability
- Independence and creativity in applying knowledge of state of the art technological capabilities to achieve solutions and then seek industry and government partnerships to develop and bring to market
- Understanding of users needs especially disadvantaged isolated individuals and communities including expertise in working indigenous communities
- Collaborative capacity building with a track record of fostering successful collaborations between disparate groups to achieve targeted outcomes
- Research strength is based on these collaborative mechanisms to fully understand perspectives of key stakeholders to match demand with supply and inform creation of innovative solutions
- Proven ability to gain real grounded understanding of users needs and achieve fits with technological capabilities

We would argue Coutts Communications offers robust highly effective very practical approach to identifying user needs in the cultural and socio economic context of users and their communities and organizations. Examples are;

- Especially for communities disadvantaged by isolation, unemployment, poor health status, disability, ageing for whom the goal is increased independence and self sufficiency (eg Ref 8)
- Highly effective strategic and grounded approach to identifying improved efficiencies and effectiveness from the deployment of ICTS in delivering community health support and information services (and indeed other services) by working closely with those service providers and their clients. (eg Ref 11)

A full review of capabilities of Coutts Communications and its principal professor Reg Coutts is available at the Web site [www.couttscommunications.com](http://www.couttscommunications.com) but a short summary of the experience and contributions of Pam Coutts and Kate Alport is given in Attachment 1

Key lessons from our experience with ICT technologies and users that Coutts Communications would like to share with the BIA team as it shapes the program and its methods of delivery are:

- Information and Communication Technologies are powerful tools that *can be* controlled by communities and used by them to reach their own goals.
- These tools will include: building business skills, project management, handling finances, eg banking, and accessing and sharing knowledge.
- People will decide what they want to do with the available technologies, assisted by a demonstration of what is possible, then a ‘hands-on’ approach, and encouragement to use their imagination (like the 3G mobile phone Focus Groups research)
- Monitoring of achievements and further workshops with the technology users are useful to ensure progress, remind people about forgotten possibilities and reinforce the skills they have gained. This fits with the ‘spiral of innovation’ approach. Innovations can be shared over the Internet with other communities.
- Video Conferencing, as used by Further Education and Education Department facilities in South Australia, and the SA Government State Plan consultants (see <http://www.stateplan.sa.gov.au/> and Outback Connect) is very useful for

community meetings across remote communities. If this is set up in an indigenous community, there could be sharing of costs with other outback, non-indigenous users and partners. The software, (Centra Live for Virtual Classes), is one example of what is available and its testing shows it is robust. As well as Community meetings, other uses are: training, education, small business meetings, informal 'classes', health consultations and legal consultations.

- Access to ICT in a more static way can improve community members' interaction with service providers through on-line templates for letters, faxes and petitions to government departments, and service providers.
- E-mails with distant family members, bulletin boards and web-logs will keep communications flowing, as will Voice-over IP.
- In all of the above, there should be an emphasis on the individuality of the needs for each remote community. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach that will be acceptable across all communities. Some run cattle stations, raise bush foods for the (specialized) market, rely on tourism or make artworks. That is why there is a need to determine what each community wants to do with the technology and some assistance to fit the technology to the users.

#### 4. Addressing Key Questions

In preparing this submission this submission, we have identified a number of questions in the Discussion Paper are an excellent *starting point* for framing the discussion about how the BIA program particularly as it inter relates to overall Connect Australia initiative. However, it is only a starting point as not only will the 'best appropriate' technological options change over time, but the indigenous communities will change in their perspective and expectations as the realise in practical relevant ways though experience what is possible.

The innovative example of Marvin<sup>TM</sup> described in Attachment 2 will likely lead to change in the expectations of indigenous users and inspire further innovation in the product as well as impact the useability of other ICT products and services.

Key questions raised in the discussion paper which we at Coutts would offer to contribute include:

- Q3 - Q6 : Wider alternative innovative options to 'community phones' in addition to the current assumption resulting from emerging technology capabilities
- Q7, Q11 : Innovative models of delivering Internet access.  
For example, Internet is useful for indigenous people for the role they have in 'caring for country', as custodians of traditional knowledge and as Park Rangers, where they can use the Net to research problems they encounter with managing their country, ways of overcoming those problems and innovative management techniques.
- Q27, Q29 : Potential implications of the increasing ability to digitally record and archive material impacting the need and use of broadband internet access  
For example, the creating and accessing content raises key issues about cultural sensitivity but ICT innovation can address. The web site

<http://www.irititja.com/> gives insight into a model for some of the things needed in the Anangu lands.

- Q33 – Q36 : Reporting of innovations in flexible approaches from overseas (eg Canada examples) including technologies and service delivery which is mentioned earlier.
- Q43 – Q46 : Collaboration models with industry engaged with the community
- Q52 : Linkage with the other elements of Connect Australia as it impacts Indigenous communities

## 5. Conclusion

This submission outlines the rationale proposed by Coutts Communications we are further developing to support the DK CRC Supplementary bid in Remote Telecommunications.

This submission commenting on the BIA Discussion Paper complements the separate submission of the Desert Knowledge CRC and the Institute of Telecommunications Research (ITR) in its own right.

Further Coutts Communications is interested in its own right in working with DCITA in the development of the BIA program.

## 6. Disclaimer

*Please note the views expressed in this submission are those of Coutts Communications and are not necessarily in complete accord with those of the Desert Knowledge CRC or those of ITR.*

## 7. References (not in order)

- [1] DK CRC BIA submission of the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2006
- [2] ITR BIA submission of the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2006
- [3] ‘Beyond The Wireless Internet Hype – Re-engaging the User.’, by Pam Coutts, Kate Alport and Reg Coutts, and David Morrell, *Communications Research Forum*, Old Parliament House, 1-2 October 2003. Canberra , ACT, Australia. [http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum\\_program\\_03.html](http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum_program_03.html)
- [4] ‘Understanding the User within the Innovation Spiral.’ Paper presented at the *IFIP Working Conference on Mobile Information Systems (MOBIS)*, Leeds, UK. December 5-6, 2005. by Reg Coutts, Pam Coutts and Kate Alport accepted for publication as Proceedings of the IFIP Mobis Conference by Kluwer/Springer.
- [5] *Electronic Voting: A Cross National Literature Survey: Report prepared for the State Electoral Office, South Australia, 2005.* Kate Alport and Lisa Hill.
- [6] ‘Trusting Democracy to Cyberspace: Lessons learnt from Trials of E-voting.’ In preparation (2006): Kate Alport and Lisa Hill.

- [7] 'E-Democracy in Australia: Practice and Innovation in South Australia.' Kate Alport and Clement Macintyre. This is part of a larger project on the theory and practice of e-democracy, funded by the ARC, with Prof John Kane, Dr. Haig Patapan and Dr Patrick Bishop.
- [8] 'A User Methodology – Identifying Telecommunications Needs', Pam Coutts, Communications Research Forum (CRF), Canberra, September 24-25, 1998. <http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/papers98.htm>
- [9] 'Banking on the move - Characterising user bottlenecks for m-commerce uptake', Pam Coutts, Communications Research Forum (CRF), Canberra, 2-3 October 2002 [http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum\\_program\\_02.html](http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum_program_02.html)
- [10] 'Teleworking Revisited: Working On-line', Pam Coutts, Communications Research Forum (CRF), Canberra, September 1999.
- [11] 'People with Disabilities Working On-line', Pam Coutts and Bob Ross Final Report to the National Office of the Information Economy (NOIE) of DCITA, May 2000.
- [12] 'Banking on the move - Characterising user bottlenecks for m-commerce uptake', Pam Coutts, Communications Research Forum (CRF), Canberra, 2-3 October 2002 [http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum\\_program\\_02.html](http://www.crf.dcita.gov.au/forum_program_02.html)
- [13] 'Collaboration, Communication and Innovation in Health Care', Brian Richards, Department of Health and Ageing, presented at the ATUG Regional Conference, Canberra, May 15<sup>th</sup> 2006

## Attachment 1 –Coutts Communications Staff

Coutts Communications Pty Ltd [www.couttscommunications.com](http://www.couttscommunications.com) is a specialist business consultancy with the aim is the successful integration of ICT technology into the creation of business value.

### Reg Coutts

After 17 years in Telstra from 1976 till 1993, in 1993 Dr Coutts was appointed to the newly created Chair of Telecommunications at the University of Adelaide. After just over 10 years with the university, Professor Coutts left the University at the end of 2003 as Emeritus Professor to establish his own company Coutts Communications Pty Ltd ([www.couttscommunications.com](http://www.couttscommunications.com)) which provides strategic advice to government and industry both in Australia and overseas.

The breadth and scope of his experience across the industry, government policy, legal disputation, research and technical innovation domains have given him management experience together with the acquisition of interpersonal and political skills very useful in isolating areas of disputation and building consensus.

Reg holds a BSc, BE (Hons) and PhD degrees from the University of Adelaide and is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Engineers (IEAust) and a Senior Member of the American Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (SMIEEE) and more recently has been accepted as a Fellow of the Australian Computer Society (FACS).

Reg is involved in a number of organizations and is currently Chaiman of the Board of the Telecommunications Society of Australia (TSA) [www.tsa.org.au](http://www.tsa.org.au).

Professor Coutts since 2003 has participated in APEC TEL and from 2006 has represented the Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association (AEEMA) at APEC TEL meetings which are held twice yearly around the 21 APEC economies.

### Coutts Communications (2004 to the present)

Coutts Communications Pty Ltd is a specialist business consultancy with the aim is the successful integration of ICT technology into the creation of business value focusing on:

- *Innovation* : Research through to commercialisation strategies. Reg is currently commercialising a product called Assure Connect that may have relevance to providing secure communications to vulnerable parties in indigenous communities
- *Telecommunications* : Technology, regulatory and business strategies concerned with emerging telecommunications technologies and wireless technologies such as WiMax
- *Intellectual Property* : Providing expert advice in regard to patent litigation for both international and Australian clients

Coutts Communications through its principal Professor Reg Coutts works collaboratively between the government, university and industry sectors of what can be termed the “innovation triangle”.

### **The University of Adelaide (1993 to 2003)**

In 1993 Coutts was appointed to the foundation Chair of Telecommunications. Professor Coutts also was Director of a new centre, the Centre for Telecommunications Information Networking (CTIN) at the University of Adelaide. CTIN had to be fully financially self-supporting within 5 years. Under Professor Coutts, CTIN achieved this goal and the Centre became a key centre for research, training and business consultancy in telecommunications in Australia and the region. Its scope covered wireless technologies, regulatory issues and the global wireless communications market where the strategy was to link specific technical research with economic/marketing factors as they might impact industry structure and business competitiveness. In addition to being Director of CTIN, Professor Coutts lead a number of broader initiatives in ICT to build the universities links to industry and Government.

From May 2002 to November 2003, Professor Coutts, while continuing to contribute to the Electrical & Electronic Engineering School, was Associate Dean Industry Linkages of the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematical and Computer Sciences. He was also Coordinator for the Smart Internet Technology CRC and Director, Technology Strategy for m.Net Corporation as an in-kind contribution.

### **Telstra (1976 to 1993)**

In July 1988, Coutts joined the commercial arm of Telecom Australia at the formation of the Mobile Communications Business Unit where he was charged with responsibility for steering the technology and regulatory direction of the business. In this capacity he directed the deregulatory process underway to minimise the erosion of business in the emerging competition environment. To this end he became actively involved in the development of the new competitive, regulatory framework, especially for the Mobile Communications Industry in Australia. Coutts had responsibility for negotiations with Government on spectrum issues, with the industry regulator Austel on competition issues and managing overall business development including research and development. In 1993, the Mobiles Business Unit R&D budget alone was in excess of \$11 million.

This involvement at the leading edge of the unfolding innovating IT&T technologies has placed Coutts at the centre of telecommunications industry development both nationally and internationally for the better part of 20 years. Consequently he built a unique professional and personal network of R&D and industry leaders both in Australia and overseas. Internationally Dr. Coutts participated in the International Telecommunications Union – the international standards organisation and as Chaired its Working Group for a Third Generation Mobile Technologies standards known as FPLMTS or IMT2000.

Dr Coutts joined the Telecom (now Telstra) Research Laboratories in 1976 in Melbourne as a research engineer after completing his postgraduate studies. From 1976 to 1988 he led research teams doing pioneering group into high capacity digital microwave systems and later into the emerging mobile communication technologies in the mid 1980's. In 1982 he became Head of the Radio and Satellite Systems Section in its Research Laboratories and from this date, he deepened his involvement in the broader telecommunications industry issues and in 1984 was seconded to the

Federal Government's Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) to assist in their review of Research and Development in Telecommunications in Australia.

### **Kate Alport**

Kate Alport works with Coutts Communications one day a week while she is completing her PhD in Politics at the University of Adelaide sponsored by the State Electoral Office on the subject 'Electronic Voting and Electoral Inclusion: Implications for South Australia'.

Previous to 2004, Kate was a social researcher in the Adelaide node of the Smart Internet CRC, part of the Centre for Internet Research (CIR) at the University of Adelaide. Kate worked with Pam Coutts and Professor Reg Coutts researching the user perspective of emerging ICT technologies particularly mobile services.

Several of Kate's research publications are cited in the References Section of the submission.

Up to 2003, Kate Alport was a Curatorial Officer in the Anthropology Department at the South Australian Museum; a social researcher in the Centre for Internet Research, a CRC in the Faculty of Engineering, Computer and Mathematical Sciences, University of Adelaide; and gained Bachelors and Honours degrees in Anthropology and a M.A. degree in International Studies, all at Adelaide University. Her areas of interest are principally qualitative research (through archival research, focus groups and interviews) on the topics of indigenous issues, social inclusion for an ageing population and people with disabilities, technology uptake and Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Pam Coutts**

Pam Coutts is a proprietor in Coutts Communications and leads the social research focus for the business and is currently enrolling to undertake a PhD in Geography under Professor Graeme Hugo looking at the "Adoption and Usage Patterns of ICT technologies by Older Australians".

Previous to 2004 from 1996, Pam was a social researcher in the Centre for Telecommunications Information Networking (CTIN) and then Adelaide node of the Smart Internet CRC, part of the Centre for Internet Research (CIR) at the University of Adelaide. Kate worked with Pam Coutts and Professor Reg Coutts researching the user perspective of emerging ICT technologies particularly mobile services.

Particular highlights of her research contributions was:

- the development over several years of a User Research methodology for systematically observing user adoption and innovation of use of ICT technologies and a number of publications. [Ref 8,9 and 12]
- Undertaking an innovation collaborative research project examining the potential use of Teleworking by people with disabilities in rural areas where this work is cited in a number of publications. [Ref 10,11]

More recently, the key findings of this early work was presented by Professor Reg Coutts in May 2005 to the Australian Telework Advisory Committee and the report of which has recently been published by the Government

- Prior to joining CTIN in 1996, Pam worked on a Government funded research project into Older Women.
- Prior to coming to Adelaide in 1994, Pam worked in Community Services in Victoria and in a number of inter Government programs and before that was a High School teacher till the mid 1980's

## Attachment 2 – Example of Innovation Opportunities

Marvin™ is an example of the development of an innovative ICT product to meet the needs of indigenous people to engage with health and education services which potentially can be delivered over a telecommunications infrastructure.

It is also an example of the innovative capability of rural communities and I understand they are currently in discussion with the Desert Knowledge CRC to continue other innovative developments.

Quoting Mr Easterby-Wood of the NT Government :

*“I believe the Territory, and indeed Australia, is a driver of innovation because of the barriers it faces – its geography, isolation and limited access to technology. These barriers have challenged us enormously to push us to the forefront of information and communication technology and realise what it can do for our businesses, our governments and our communities.”*

By connecting innovative communities and commercial ICT companies there is the potential for the DK CRC to grow and sustain a myriad of such solutions.

### MARVIN™ Example

Leading software technology that was developed in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia, and used to create one of the most exciting and affordable animated computer programs in the world, was recognised at the inaugural NT Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Awards late last year.

Known affectionately as ‘MARVIN’ (Messaging Architecture for the Retrieval of Versatile Information and News), the software is revolutionising the way important health messages are delivered to remote NT communities. It has also generated widespread international interest from developing countries and regions.

MARVIN took out the event’s ‘Overall Award’ at the Awards night held in Darwin while its co-creator, Mr J Easterby-Wood won the ‘Achiever of the Year Award’. The MARVIN consortium is made up of the NT Department of Health & Community Services (DHCS), the NT Department of Employment Education & Training (DEET) and the software development house ‘Inchain’.

The software was designed with funding and support from the 2000-2004 Australian Flexible Learning Framework’s (2000-2004 Framework) LearnScope professional development program. The 2000-2004 Framework was a national strategy to support the vocational education and training (VET) system to meet the rapidly increasing demand for flexible learning, including e-learning.



**From left: Nick Russell, Managing Director of Inchain and Vicki Russell, Program Manager of Inchain (winner of the 2004 NT ICT Award Overall for MARVIN), and J.Easterby-Wood, Achiever of the Year.**

Taking out the two technology awards capped off an amazing year for MARVIN. In addition to taking out four major awards at the 2004 NT Training Awards in September, MARVIN also beat heavy global competition for the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management international innovations award in Singapore in October. The MARVIN technology was also a finalist at the 2004 National Training Awards held in Melbourne in November 2004.

MARVIN was created in 2003 to tackle substance abuse in remote communities, and features animated three-dimensional characters, which resemble community leaders and can speak in their own Indigenous languages.

“I believe the Territory, and indeed Australia, is a driver of innovation because of the barriers it faces – its geography, isolation and limited access to technology. These barriers have challenged us enormously to push us to the forefront of information and communication technology and realise what it can do for our businesses, our governments and our communities,” Mr Easterby-Wood said.

“The more time we spend with this type of avatar (character-based) technology, the more time we’ll spend on blending training boundaries between the best of what technology and humanity has to offer and between trainers and learners and vice-versa. We are considered by many of our national and international peers as being world drivers and leaders in this particular field of IT and that is extremely rewarding for us as Territorians and as Australians.”

Speaking after the Awards ceremony – which recognised ‘outstanding performance and contributions by members of the ICT community in the Northern Territory’ – Mr Easterby-Wood said that each award won by MARVIN symbolised the teamwork, passion and drive of the people involved in creating, designing and developing the computer software program.

“The other finalists in the Achiever category are all highly respected in the field of information and communications technology in the Territory, so to even be short-listed was humbling. To have won outright is something I am still coming to terms with.”

“Four years ago, for me personally ‘PowerPoint’ was something I plugged an overhead projector into, and now, with the support of an amazing group of passionate and creative people and because of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework and LearnScope, in particular, we are working on next generation systems which are revolutionising how people interact with technology and with each other.”

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) and the Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA NT) jointly conducted the Awards.

To find out more about MARVIN or to see a demonstration of the program, contact Mr Easterby-Wood by email: [J.Easterby-Wood@nt.gov.au](mailto:J.Easterby-Wood@nt.gov.au) or tel: 61 (0) 427 250 057 or visit the Inchain website under development at <http://www.inchain.com.au>

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