



## **Response to departmental discussion paper on the design of the On Farm Connectivity Program**

Network Hoist Pty Ltd was founded in June 2022 to take advantage of emerging technologies to deliver on farm connectivity solutions for farmers and other rural professionals. We have rolled out products commercially and installed wifi units in farm vehicles and fixed connectivity base stations to meet the individual use requirements of each business. Our engagement with farm businesses encompasses on site diagnostics, testing, solution development, installation, and ongoing support.

Information about Network Hoist is available here: <https://networkhoist.com/>.

We support the government's proposed approach as outlined in the department's discussion paper. In particular, we support the following elements of the program:

**1. Scope of equipment proposed for funding (Wi-Fi solutions, antennas, etc).** The department has correctly identified the types of equipment that should be covered, and we welcome the inclusion of costs associated with installation and instructional delivery. We anticipate that there will be calls for the program to be broadened to a wide range of sensor equipment. However, this would not be directly related to improving connectivity and is covered by other programs such as the NSW Farms of The Future program.

**2. Providing rebates to eligible suppliers via the Business Grants Hub.** We think it important to reduce the administrative burden on farm businesses and this approach achieves this outcome.

**3. Financial parameters limiting rebates to between \$1,000 and \$20,000.** We think this is an appropriate setting to enable significant connectivity improvements on farm, and enabling as many businesses as possible to share in the finite funding available under the program. We would encourage the department to be aware of limiting rebates per ABN, rather than per transaction/purchase, to avoid program rorting. For similar reasons, we would suggest limiting the total funding any provider can claim via rebates to \$1 million.

Our responses to specific questions in the discussion paper and suggestions for improvement are included below.

**Question 1 - Would you be interested in applying to be an eligible equipment service provider?**

Yes.

**Question 2 - Do you have any comments or questions about proposed eligibility requirements for equipment service providers?**

Network Hoist is a relatively new business operating in this sector, although our founder has an established history of service provision in the agricultural sector. The discussion paper alludes to a possible threshold for equipment service providers twice in the discussion paper:

“Eligible companies must have an ABN and be able to demonstrate a track record of delivering workable solutions to Australian primary producers.”

“Eligible equipment service providers will also be required to demonstrate their qualifications and track record as a mature commercial operator in the market...”

We would support the threshold of being able to demonstrate the delivery of workable solutions, rather than applying the less well defined notion of ‘mature commercial operator’.

Our view is that if a company has demonstrated its capacity via the Regional Tech Hub and can demonstrate its successful commercial use in the farm sector, these should be sufficient indicators of suitability to participate in the program. A ‘maturity’ test that discounts the emerging nature of these technologies and associated service industries would stifle innovation and restrict the availability of technologically advanced products in the market.

**Question 3 - What would hinder you from participating as an eligible equipment service provider?**

Our participation would be hindered by the following:

1. An unsuitable ‘maturity’ test for eligibility.
2. Uncertainty about the delivery of the rebate after only charging customers half price for delivering improved connectivity on farm, or unnecessary delays in delivering that rebate after our service had been delivered to farm businesses.

**Question 4**

**What is the most popular and relevant connectivity product your business provides to farming, fisheries or forestry businesses?**

The installation of a 4G enabled Wi-Fi network within and around vehicles has been our most popular product offering. In most locations, our product exceeds the telephony performance of Cel-fi boosters via internet-based calling, while providing vastly superior access to data in challenging locations.

Our Wi-Fi extender package - enabling connectivity up to 150m from equipped farm vehicles - is also very useful in many farming scenarios, particularly in irrigated farming, where vehicle access in paddocks can be challenging.



**Question 5**

**Do you have any concerns regarding sourcing connectivity products? Are there any supply chain issues currently affecting your business?**

Our supplies of key equipment have been maintained through the recent difficult period for supply chains. From order to delivery of our key proprietary equipment, the turnaround time is approximately three months. Other equipment is much shorter than this. We currently have a stockpile of devices held as inventory to manage supply chain risks.

**Question 6**

**Do you have any suggestions on how the Program can be improved?**

See comments above. Our concerns are primarily related to:

- supplier eligibility thresholds
- an unreliable or unpredictable rebate process
- too broad a scope of products and services undermining core project objectives, and
- applying sensible limits on rebates to prevent program rorting by unethical operators.

**Question 7**

**Please provide any other information that you think would assist the Department in designing this Program.**

We would be happy to discuss this submission further if that would be of interest to the department. Our CEO Andrew Bomm has experience with policy design as a researcher with Senate committees and in agricultural industry bodies.

Please feel free to call Andrew on 040827006 or email at [admin@networkhoist.com](mailto:admin@networkhoist.com).