

25/7/24

Country Education Partnership (CEP) is an organisation that supports rural schools across Victoria.

CEP staff travel over 150 000 km a year to all parts of Victoria. The organisation has over 400 rural schools in its membership base, with many of them small schools in communities either under 1000 people or remote by Victorian standards.

It has become clearly evident to the entire CEP staff and the smaller rural schools that there are significant parts of Victoria where mobile phone coverage is poor. The concerns for school staff include the safety issues when students leave the school grounds on local excursions, the inability for parents or Education Department to contact staff in the lead up to the school day, as school staff travel through areas of poor connectivity. One example - there is poor connectivity within the town with Moonambel and Navarre (2 ½ hours from Melb as examples) but also poor connectivity on the edge of larger regional towns (Maryborough) and for whole stretches of highway. The example is that the principal of [REDACTED] is uncontactable for 30 min in the morning and afternoon as he commutes back to and from Ballarat, where no reliable signal exists until the town of Learmonth. These examples occur throughout the state. Often there appear no geographical reason for there not to be a signal.

For residents in rural Victoria, travelling on many of the main roads presents many issues with little or no connectivity. Situations such as collisions with Kangaroos are common place for rural drivers but dont warrant an emergency call. Having to flag down another car because of no signal , at night in winter, has many risk elements attached that could be alleviated

Whilst the connectivity concerns in Victoria may seem minor compared to outback WA, NT and NSW, as an organisation, CEP are very concerned that there have been very few improvements in the past ten years and no apparent or visible plan to attend to the situation. There is not any sense of urgency around the matter at a political level. We are concerned that Victoria will be the forgotten poor cousin in regard to solutions, as clearly evident by the list of Victorian communities in the Telstra Mobile Black Spot Program.

Regards

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CEO Country Education Partnership
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