

Network Load and Coverage Issues

In 2016, Mansfield Shire had a population of 8584 residents. This number grew significantly during and post the Covid19 Pandemic to reach 10,097 in 2021. Council is now expecting that the population of Mansfield shire to grown by a further 6,569 people by 2046. This is a 65.06% growth in the current population, at an average annual change of 2.02%.

This huge growth in Mansfield Shire's resident population, coupled with an extraordinary level of tourism visitation throughout the year, has shown that our wireless telecommunications bandwidth simply does not cope and creates major issues for both our residents and visitors.

During holiday periods, residents regularly find themselves with a non-responsive internet at home, in their offices and when mobile. Goughs Bay and Jamieson residents often inform of network failures where no internet is available through any of the available wireless systems. Local businesses are financially disadvantaged when these services are slowed by load. It becomes completely non-responsive and as a result, point of sale systems fail and event management coordination is compromised due to the inability to assist visitors and patrons.

Council continues to advocate strongly on the importance of fibre being installed in all towns and settlements to return users to a fixed line call and data service as a first preference. This removal of load from the wireless network can provide a massive improvement to wireless services through load reduction.

Emergency Coverage

A number of Mansfield Shire's outlying communities are located in high bushfire risk areas and reliable communications is a high priority for their safety.

During planned and unplanned power outages, residents are being left without the ability to make emergency calls as local towers are without sufficient power backup, resulting in telecommunications ceasing to operate completely. This is particularly true in Jamieson. These communities are in urgent need of Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS), generators or solar panels and batteries to ensure that they are not left without the means to contact emergency services.

Mansfield Shire Council urges that Government funding be continued to support Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) services at the Neighbourhood Safer Places and Bushfire Places of Last Resort within the Shire. These services are critical to both community and emergency services, particularly when telecommunications services are impacted by disasters such as fire, floods, landslides and earthquakes – all of which are experienced within Mansfield Shire. Focus should be placed on providing STAND services and wireless network infrastructure with Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS), solar and/or generator

backup. The ability to maintain network capability while waiting for fuel to be provided to generators needs to be high priority.

Mansfield Shire Council is calling on Government and Telecommunication service providers to agree to cooperate in securing facilities, to support communities in emergency circumstances that will enable basic telecommunications when there is critically damaged (unserviceable) infrastructure.

We have become aware that works funded and planned for Kennedys Point and Bonnie Doon, originally due to be undertaken by December 2023, may be delayed for another 2 to 3 years due to resource issues. Will this delay diminish the allocated funding capacity? The facility was advocated for, largely, due to safety issues and lack of coverage, and these issues only grow over time.

Coordination of Works

Recently, Telstra and Optus were tasked to perform upgrade works at Sawmill Settlement on the same day. As a result of these notifications, many residents planned to leave Sawmill and to work and study elsewhere for the duration of the outages.

However, when the companies then discovered that they were both working on the same site at the same time, they both cancelled their works, without sufficient notification to local residents. This left residents out of pocket, local business spaces were commercially impacted, and travel and office space booking fees that they had incurred without need were left to the residents to bear.

Mansfield's community recognises the value of the improvements to service that they have received during the last 3 years and greatly appreciate the efforts made and outcomes achieved. Improvements including upgrades from 4G to 5G, in towns situated along the major traffic corridor of the Maroondah Highway between Melbourne and Mt Buller, NBNCo upgrades from satellite services to fixed wireless and fixed wireless to fibre to the kerb technology, 4G hardware upgrades to mobile wireless towers in the Jamieson, Tolmie and Howqua Inlet areas, and funding to construct a macro mobile site at Kennedy's Point in the Bonnie Doon area on Lake Eildon. These are all incredibly welcome additions to our Shire's community and regional connectivity aspirations.

Council is committed to continuing its advocacy on behalf of our rural and remote community members to achieve the best, reliable telecommunications system for our residents and visitors, in all circumstances.

Mansfield Shire Council confirms that the information contained within this submission may be made publicly available.

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