

To the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee,

Thank you for being available to hear the opinions of the public on matters regarding telecommunications in regional and remote areas of Australia.

While most Australians appreciate the focus on improving our mobile network, the existing networks still need to function to meet the requirements for those living and working on agriculture properties, and those who travel on the road for work who have become accustomed to knowing where to expect signal. Landlines may not be commonly used, but there are those in remote areas where mobile coverage does not reach them, or isn't consistent enough to be relied upon, who are let down during power outages or forgotten when there is no alternative. Up until two years ago, there seemed to be a major reduction in roads with no mobile signal, which made travellers feel safer knowing they would be able to make contact in case of an emergency or breakdown, unfortunately this seems to no longer be evident.

My family and I have a property [REDACTED] out of Meekatharra, and another between Geraldton and Mullewa, in Western Australia. In the Meekatharra district, the residents felt ignored and forgotten when lightning struck a local telephone aerial, leaving them without a landline for approximately two weeks. Residents in these remote areas of the district don't have mobile coverage but are fortunate to have satellite internet now in which to lodge a fault report. However, if people experience failure in their "off grid" power, they have no access to communication except for the landline in which to seek help. Returning to the earlier example of a breakdown in a local telephone aerial. When locals reported it, they were asked

“why not use your mobile?” Or “how are you able to contact us then?” Ultimately resulting in a feeling of a lack of understanding from the telecommunication provider as to the severity of the situation stemming from living in an area where communication options are limited.

Around the Geraldton area, I was surprised to find that the local telephone aerials, or towers, do not have a substantial back up power source. Therefore, in the eventuality of a power outage, the landlines fail after a day or two. Power outages are common during summer, due to fires and hot weather. Reason enough to want to ensure access to all forms of communication, but if backup power fails, residents are left without communication. In this particular instance, I would ask the committee to consider that telephone towers in areas similar to the Geraldton area be configured similar to those in pastoral areas, with larger capacity batteries and a solar panel to keep them charged.

I don't travel for work, except to drive between our two properties or to go to town for supplies. I have noticed a major reduction in the mobile service in the City of Greater Geraldton Shire, and on trips to Perth, and along the Great Northern Highway. I grew up with signal being restricted to town sites or specific localities, as I grew older, I saw the growth of the signal spread further from these areas. It was a major benefit to those travelling on the road whether for work or leisure, reducing the possible dangers involved during a breakdown or an emergency situation. I believe in the areas mentioned, the signal coverage has been reduced by 30% to 40% (this is my opinion, not fact), but you notice the absence more in certain areas where coverage is definitely required. If this is to do with upgrading the services to 5G for the improvement of access to Multi Media Services, I would like the Committee to please reconsider this, in favour of providing a consistent mobile phone service to aide in the readiness for emergency situations. If someone dies in an accident because a phone call can't

be made, even though a mobile tower is in view; while someone safe at home is able to watch something on social media, or stream a recent program with greater download speed, I should think that priorities need to be seriously reexamined.

Again, thank you for your time in reading my thoughts and opinions, and may we work together to improve the connection and safety through telecommunication for all Australians.

Regards,

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