Regional Telecommunications Review

Summary Paper

July 2024

Contents

1. Background

The purpose of this submission is to highlight the key issues in the Yorke and Mid North region of South Australia pertaining to connectivity.

The 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review is undertaken every three years and is an opportunity for Australians living and working in rural, regional and remote communities to share their views and experiences using telecommunications services. The Review will also work with industry to consider regulatory settings and map solutions to improve regional communications.

Public consultation will commence in April this year, with the Committee's final report due to Government by December 2024. Further information can be found here.

Regional Development Australia Yorke and Mid North (RDA Yorke and Mid North) is an incorporated organisation funded by Federal, State and local government. Our main goal is to promote and facilitate sustainable community and economic development within the regions of Yorke, Mid North and the Southern Flinders Ranges. During the past fourteen years RDA Yorke and Mid North has worked alongside a number of Councils, businesses, community and not-for-profit groups to increase economic activity and competitiveness and to enhance social and environmental outcomes for our region.

1.1.   Summary of the region

RDA Yorke and Mid North Region

Data Sources

- ABS 2021 Census Place of Work Employment (Scaled)
- ABS 2021 / 2022 National Input Output Tables
- ABS June 2023 Gross State Product
- ABS 2021 Census Place of Work Employment (Scaled)
- ABS 2022 / 2023 Tourism Satellite Account
- TRA 2022 Tourism Profile REMPLAN 2022 Tourism Analysis Model

Summary Findings

|	
ABS 2023 Estimated Residential Population:	78,904
ABS 2021 Census Place of Usual Residence Population:	76,787
Land Area (ha):	4,991,188
Census Population Density (persons / ha):	0.015
Gross Regional Product ($M):	$4,892
Per Hectare Gross Regional Product ($):	$980
Per Capita Gross Regional Product ($K):	$63
Per Worker Gross Regional Product ($K):	$170

1.2. Output

Total Output in the area is estimated at $11,261.135 million.

The major contributors to output are:

Industry Sector	$M	%
Manufacturing	$3,171.877	28.2%
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	$2,157.186	19.2%
Construction	$1,062.228	9.4%
Other	$4,869.844	43.2%

Output - RDA Yorke and Mid North Region (2023 Release 2)

$M
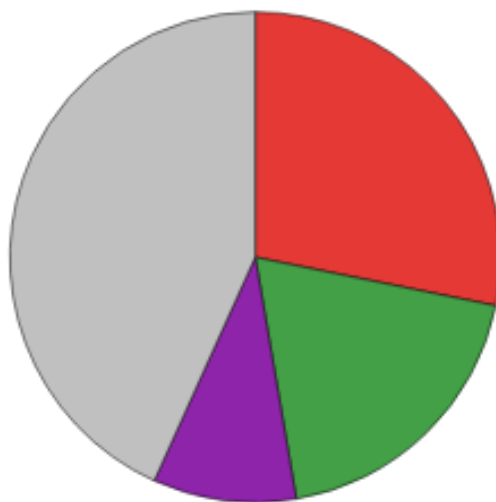
🔴 Manufacturing $3,171.877
🟢 Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing $2,157.186
🟣 Construction $1,062.228
⚪ Balance $4,869.844

REMPLAN

1.3.   Employment

Total Employment in the area is estimated at 28,702 jobs.

The major contributors to employment are:

Industry Sector	Jobs	%
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	5,008	17.4%
Health Care & Social Assistance	4,391	15.3%
Retail Trade	2,901	10.1%
Other	16,40	57.1%

Employment - RDA Yorke and Mid North Region (2023 Release 2)
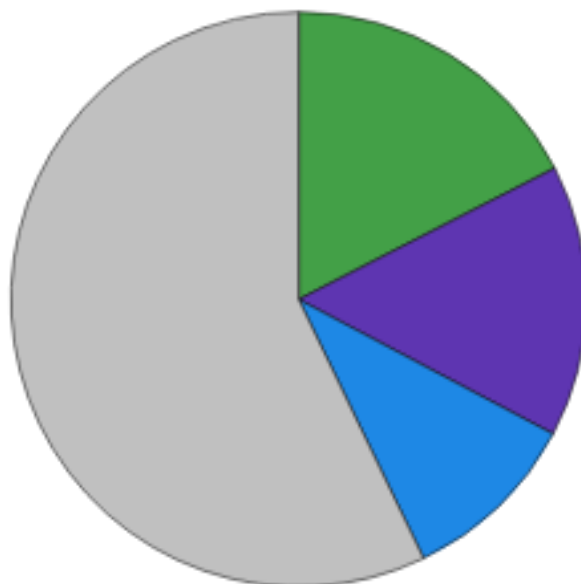
Jobs

● Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing 5,008
● Health Care & Social Assistance 4,391
● Retail Trade 2,901
○ Balance 16,402

REMPLAN

1.4.   Value-Added

Total Value-added in the area is estimated at $4,498.784 million.

The major contributors to value-added are

Industry Sector	$M	%
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	$1,006	22.4%
Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services	$640	14.2%
Health Care & Social Assistance	$454	10.1%
Other	$2,397	53.3%

Value Added - RDA Yorke and Mid North Region (2023 Release 2)

$M

🟢 Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing $1,006.665
🌸 Rental, Hiring & Real Estate Services $640.420
🟣 Health Care & Social Assistance $454.416
⚪ Balance $2,397.283

REMPLAN

2. Local Government Areas Findings

2.1. Context

The following information was provided after surveys were distributed to Councils by RDA Yorke and Mid North staff. Councils were provided with the instructions (detailed below) to inform their responses.

Previously, in early 2023, a survey was undertaken by Regional Development Australia Yorke and Mid North (RDAYMN) to identify the region's mobile network and internet Black Spots.

This was to inform a submission lodged to the ACCC Regional Mobile Infrastructure Inquiry that resulted in grant funding supplied through the "Improving Mobile Black Spot Program's Improving Mobile Coverage" Round by the Federal Government, to establish new base stations at Port Rickaby and Wool Bay.

In preparation for the upcoming 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review, RDAYMN consulted with a range of stakeholders to identify issues with connectivity in the Yorke and Mid North region in order to present a well-informed and comprehensive submission.

2.2. Identification of Black Spots

Black Spots have been identified in this submission via surveys completed by appropriate council's staff, requested as follows:

Councils are best placed to identify black spots in their local areas and we would be grateful for the appropriate staff to complete the attached worksheet with observed Black Spots in their regions.

* Please note - due to a lack of responses from some councils, data from the previous survey was used where possible, otherwise a data gap may be observed.

2.3. Individual Council Findings Worksheets

BARUNGA WEST COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Bute	not provided
Port Broughton	not provided
Mundoora	not provided
Tickera	not provided
Fisherman Bay	not provided

COPPER COAST COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Moonta Bay	not provided

CLARE AND GILBERT VALLEYS COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Auburn	not provided
Bungaree Station	not provided
Manoora	not provided
Mintaro	not provided
Rhynie	not provided
Tarlee	not provided

Tothill Creek	not provided
Waterloo	not provided

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF MOUNT REMARKABLE	COMMENTS
Port Germein Gorge	no coverage at all - present risk management issue (bushfire)
Horrock's Pass	no coverage at all - present risk management issue (bushfire)
Murray Town	Township has no reception either Telco
Southern Flinders National Park	Major mountain biking trail network established, no phone coverage

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF ORROROO CARRIETON	COMMENTS
Along road from Orroroo to Laura	not provided

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF PETERBOROUGH	COMMENTS
Peterborough	Telstra Ok - Optus limited

NORTHERN AREAS COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Andrews	Still issues
Yacka	not provided
Beetaloo Valley	
Tarcowie	No / limited coverage in town
Caltowie	Patchy in township
Caltowie North - Hornsdale	No / limited coverage - along Caltowie-Tarcowie Rd
Canowie Belt to Whyte Yarcowie	Troublesome spots [into Goyder area too]
washpool, Caltowie, Whyte Yarcowie	Patchy on the main road between Caltowie and Gladstone and Caltowie and Laura
Georgetown	Almost no coverage with Telstra, some coverage with Optus
Spalding / Andrews	Several spots between Spalding and the border with CGVC
███████████████████	Always been an issue
███████████████████████ ████████████	Always been an issue
Neindorf Road through to Bundaleer forest	Always been an issue
Caltowie triad between Caltowie & Gladstone many places	Always been an issue
███████████████████████ ████████████████	Always been an issue
████████████████████	Has always been a troublesome area. There would be approximately 10 farmhouses within a 5-10km radius all with the same issues
Washpool, Caltowie, Whyte yarcowie	Always been an issue

Tarcowie	The area of Tarcowie has never had any mobile phone coverage
████████████████████████████ ██████████████	Issue since mobile phones have been available. No signal reception on the majority of property or inside house (except at specific site at kitchen window). Reception is possible when standing at northwestern boundary with line of sight to ████████████ The 'black spot' appears to extend out to the Hubert Wilkins Highway and north up the Beetaloo Valley Rd
██████████████████████████	Always been an issue
███████████████████	Always been an issue
Beetaloo Valley	The last 20+ years
████████████████	25 years
████████████████	20+ years
██████████████████████████ ███	Since the beginning of mobile phone and internet services. We are in a black spot from all towers at our house.
Most of Wilkins Highway ████████████ ██████████████	Always. Getting worse now with longer trucks allowed. More people choosing to live in rural areas and work in Port Pirie. At least two more overtaking lanes needed between Highway 1 and Gladstone.
Caltowie-Georgetown Road. ██████ ████████████████████████████ ████████████████████████████ ██████	Always been an issue
Beetaloo ██████████████████████	We have a phone tower on the roof of the farmhouse, currently 3G. The phone works sometimes. Internet is via a modem which is a movable one. It only works if connected to an aerial placed in the window of one room in the house. Some mobiles will work in this room, some will receive messages or ring in the kitchen but have to be taken to the one room with coverage. A few work around the outside of the house. Most places on the property have no coverage at all, especially the front gate. Wind, rain and storms in general usually stop all internet, phone and television services. In case of emergency, we usually have to drive to a neighbour's property for help. The 3G is about to be upgraded to 4G, it remains to see what happens. Prior to the 3G tower we had mobile coverage on hill tops, carried on the analogue TV signal. When analogue was cut so was our coverage. Telstra is well aware of the problems, as their technicians regularly find that they have no coverage either. One technician who came out got lost. We found him at the end of the road. When queried why he was lost when Telstra had GPS locations for the house and the gate, we were informed he was issued with a phone with no GPS and had not been given any co-ordinates. He had a map of the road reserves, with my house marked on it - some 3km from its actual location, in an area with no actual buildings. The problem extends into the Port Pirie Council area also.

████████████████	We have noticed a reduction in signal since 5G was rolled out. As I type this, we have the usual 0 bars of signal and rely on satellite for email. Previously we could a bar of signal except in severe weather. Our Telstra landline was so unreliable we gave it up in frustration. It dropped out every time it rained or got extremely hot. Service techs told us the line up Beetaloo was in poor condition. With no satellite or phone coverage often on extreme weather days we tend to get a bit nervous.
█████████████████	Given the amount of money that we have spent over the last 10 years, the quality of our service remains terrible. To add insult to injury, Telstra have discontinued servicing the landline in Beetaloo Valley, and it has deteriorated to the point where we no longer even try to use it. It was too dilapidated to hold any form of quality conversation and it is not possible to get any form of internet. The NBN does not plan to service Beetaloo Valley, and we need to drive to the top of the driveway to get a mobile signal on most days. Over the years, we have invested in masts and large antenna and have tried pointing it at all the local towers. This has proven unreliable with all the so-called Telstra 'upgrades' that have been done over the last few years – i.e. the service is so bad, that we recently installed a Sky Muster satellite NBN. The quality of this service is also unreliable due to the lag and constant dropouts as the system continually changes servers across the country. We are currently considering a wi-fi extender so we can make/receive phone call when not in the house; however, this will just extend the range of a poor-quality service. We support any move to review and improve the quality of our mobile service. Given the poor quality of the service we receive, we believe it represents a significant safety risk.
████████████████████████████ ████████████████████	Purchased property approx. 3 years ago, there was no service at the house, so we had to climb a hill to get service. After contacting Telstra, they informed us we needed a booster aerial Mobile Smart Antenna 4G at a cost of over $3,000 and they installed it. The aerial and associated equipment is suitable for 4G network as they told us that 3G would be eventually turned off. We have 2 mobile 4G Telstra phones. The service was still intermittent and then when Telstra did work on the ████████████ in February 2024 we lost service altogether. We contacted Telstra who checked our setup and said everything was okay, but there was no signal from ███ ████████, it was the worse signal rating of minus 128, they said nothing had been turned off at the tower. Approximately three weeks ago shortly after we spoke to Telstra our service came back on, like they had turned something back on, the service is still a bit hit and miss. ████████████████████████████████ ██████

| PORT PIRIE REGIONAL COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Wandearah	West of Old Broughton Road at Wandearah where people have to access a satellite service - without it phones only run on 4G or even 3G when the weather and or signal is bad.
Hughes Gap	███████████████████████████████████████ ████████████
West of Pt Broughton Road ████████	People have to access a satellite service, without it phones only run on 4G or even 3G when the weather and/or signal is bad
The hills between Redhill and Koolunga	not provided

REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOYDER	COMMENTS
Peep Hill	not provided
Booborowie	not provided

WAKEFIELD REGIONAL COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Brinkworth	not provided
East of Port Wakefield	not provided
Hoyelton	not provided
Halbury & Hoyleton	Could be considered a joint blackspot considered their proximity to one another
Bowmans	Connectivity issues including weak phone & internet signal have been reported around Bowmans Internodal site with significant agriculture and transport logistic site in the region

YORKE PENINSULA COUNCIL	COMMENTS
Ardrossan	Coverage
Balgowan	No coverage
Black Point	Limited coverage
Clinton Centre	No coverage
Coobowie	Coverage
Corny Point	Little to no service
Curramulka	Coverage
Marion Bay	Little to no service
Petersville	Little to no service
Pine Point	Little to no service
Port Julia	Little to no service
Port Rickaby	Limited coverage
Port Vincent	Little to no service
Sandilands	Little to no service
South Kilkerran	Limited coverage
Spencer Highway and surrounds. 13.5km south of Maitland	Limited coverage
Stansbury	Have Optus service

Urania	No coverage
Winulta	No coverage
Yorke Valley	Little to no service
St Vincent Highway - Pt Vincent to Pt Julia	Little to no service OPTUS
Corny Point to Marion Bay bitumen	Little to no service OPTUS

2.4. Map of Black Spots
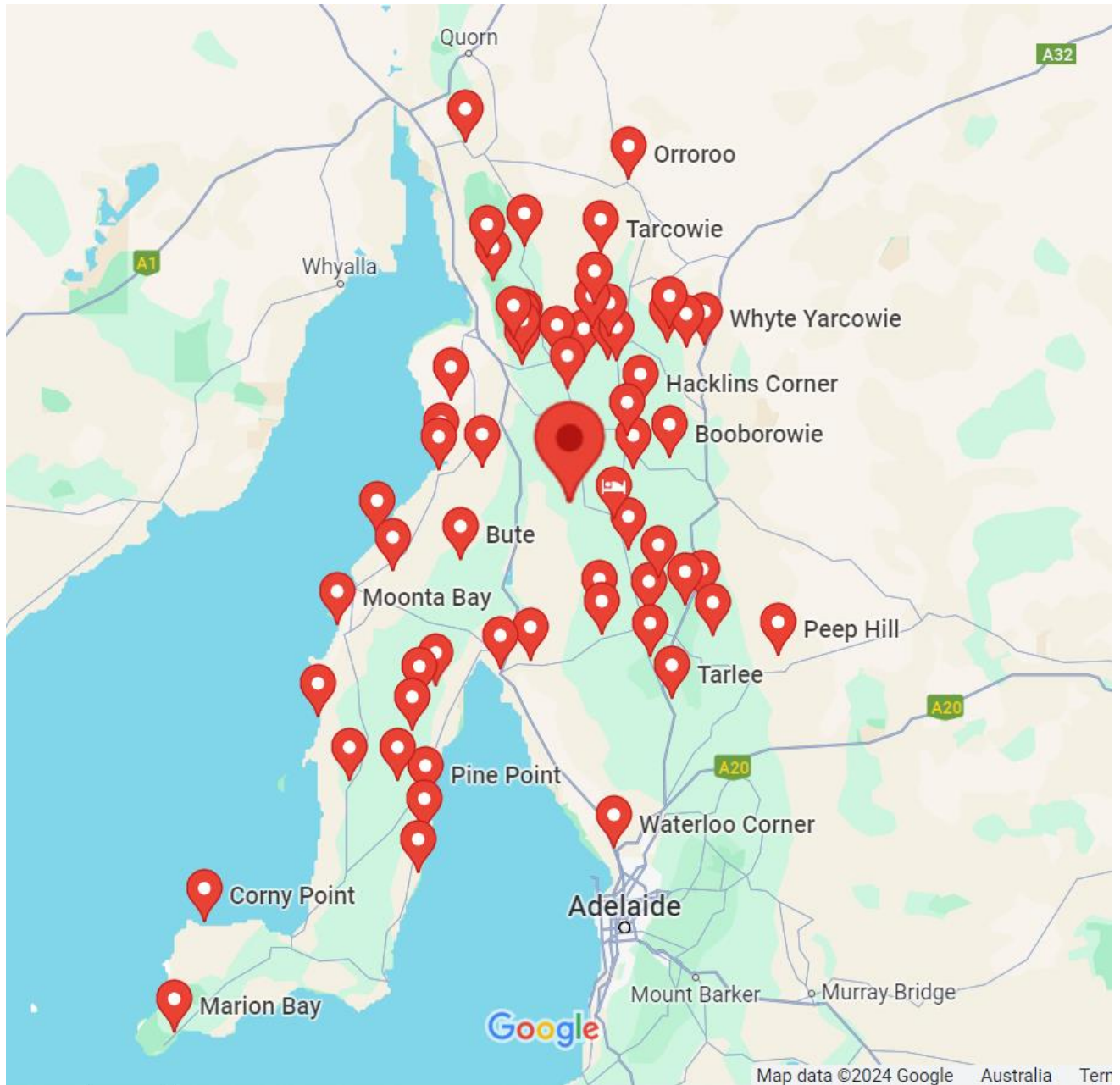
2.5.   Recommendations derived from findings

As can be seen in the tables above there are a number of connectivity issues in the region. RDA staff has used the following factors to identify areas of priority:

1.   Number of permanent residents
2.   Risk factors – isolation, bushfire risk, access issues
3.   Current network coverage
4.   Visitation
5.   Industry
6.   Transport corridors
7.   Alternative communication options (satellite, landline, CB radio)

Taking these factors into consideration, RDA staff has identified the following locations as priorities for investment in telecommunication upgrades.

Location	Number of permanent residents	Isolated	Bushfire Risk	Access Issues	Poor coverage	No Coverage	Visitation	Industry	Transport corridor
Halbury & Hoyelton	■		x			x			x
Rhynie	■		x			x	x		x
Balgowan	■	x	x			x	x		
Waterloo	■	x	x			x			
Beetaloo Valley	■	x	x	x		x	x		
Murray Town	■		x			x			x
Bowmans	■		x		x			x	x
Urania	■		x			x			x
Tarcowie	■	x	x			x			
Winulta	■	x	x			x			
Clinton Centre	■	x	x			x			
Port Germein Gorge	N/A	x	x	x		x	x		x
Horrock's Pass	N/A	x	x	x		x	x		x

3. Main Issues for Yorke and Mid North Region

Telecommunications needs in regional Australia, gap in services, barriers to addressing needs, gaps and improvement in telecommunications outcomes.

As every regional and rural area in Australia, our region relies heavily on internet access for education, business healthcare and personal communication. 'Black spots' identified in our region severely hamper the quality of life of the residents and visitors alike, negatively impacting on industry and productivity. Those locations that are isolated, at risk of natural disaster and are home to many residents are of most significance.

Our region has a predominant agricultural sector and National Parks. During bushfires, the loss of telecommunications poses extreme risks to fire fighters, farmers and community members. Some of our popular tourism destinations, particularly remote beaches and national parks have limited coverage (both phone and internet) which poses challenges particularly with regards to tourists' way-finding.

Consistently the message is the same for regional Australia requiring services equal to the of the metro areas, as follows:

- Reliable access and coverage
- Affordable services
- Advanced technologies
- Consistent mobile coverage

As demonstrated by the table above and reports from councils the region suffers from service gaps in the following:

- Coverage gaps
- Service quality
- Infrastructure deficiencies

However, addressing these needs are consistently hampered by:

- Geographic challenges
- Economic viability
- Funding limitations
- Technological limitations

As technologies improve the regions is seeing instances of improved connectivity through the likes of wireless and satellite technologies.

RDAYMN has identified that in addition to infrastructure and technology issues suffered by the region, lack of awareness and understanding by residents of what services and technologies are available and how to access it contribute to the underutilisation of existing services and opportunity for improved connectivity.

RDAYMN is currently working in conjunction with Regional Tech Hub to create awareness and education through workshops, promotions and one-on-one interactions which has proven successful and assisted residents to access better connectivity. It is therefore recommended to continue and expand the Regional Tech Hub service.

In summary, addressing the telecommunications gaps in the Yorke and Mid North region is crucial for enhancing the quality of life, safety, and economic productivity of its residents. Continued investment in infrastructure, technology, and educational initiatives, is essential to ensure equitable access to reliable, affordable, and advanced telecommunications services across the region.