Shire of Lake Grace

Please address all correspondence to the Chief Executive Officer
Your Ref:

Regional Telecommunication Review 2024 Committee

RE: REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION REVIEW 2024

In developing 'Aspire 2033' the Shire of Lake Grace Strategic Community Plan the communities of Lake Grace, Newdegate, Lake King and Varley identified telecommunication reliability and coverage as a key risk during consultation as part of the Strategic Community Planning process.

Reliable telecommunication is critical to the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of the Shire of Lake Grace.

The Shire of Lake Grace is one of the largest agricultural shires in Western Australia and covers an area of 11,890 km2. The economy of the wider region is primarily based on agriculture and associated support industries. Broadacre farmers in the wheatbelt region of Western Australia are among the most innovative in the world and there are significant opportunities for increased efficiency and productivity from reliable and fast telecommunications access.

Mining, health, education, and construction also contribute to the economy of the wheatbelt region. The uptake of information technology systems to assist business growth and development is high in modern agriculture, mining and associated business systems.

Some improvements to the internet access have been made in recent years due to private investment however it is largely based around the major towns of Lake Grace and Newdegate. There is still is an inadequate service to the outlying communities of Lake King and Varley. This poses a significant impediment to the use of information and communication technology and to the operation of local government and small businesses in the Shire of Lake Grace.

Power outages are common and frequent mainly in our eastern areas. The provision of diesel generators will no doubt assist during times of an emergency provided they are kept running. At present Telstra employees are the only people authorised to maintain these generators. If Local Governments were given authorisation to enter the Telstra tower compounds to refuel the generators and keep them running it would be more efficient than having a Telstra employee travel several hours to simply refuel a generator and would ensure a continuity of power to maintain the towers and to help ensure the safety of the communities.

The exchange in Lake Grace recently lost power for the first time in living memory. According to an ex Telstra employee and current telecommunications sub-contractor this was purely due to a lack of maintenance. Similarly the land lines for the local exchanges also lost power due to lack of maintenance. The land lines are the only phone communication that Telstra is legislated to have to maintain and they are not doing it. It is why many people continue to

Shire of Lake Grace ~ 'The Growing Centre'

pay for the service but do not necessarily use. This would be less of an issue if Telstra would allow locals or Local Government to put generators on the exchanges.

Faster and more reliable telecommunications would benefit the Shire of Lake Grace communities by;

1. Improved productivity and efficiency for small businesses and community groups

2. Efficiency and operational savings for agricultural industries that require high speed data transfer for technology throughout the supply chain from farm to the consumer.

3. Improved decision making with easier and quicker access to reliable information to improve traceability, security and automation including:
   - CCTV monitoring
   - Water sensors for tanks, troughs and irrigation.
   - Weather stations and soil moisture monitoring.
   - Gate and fence sensors.
   - Electronic identification tags for livestock records and monitoring.
   - Autonomous vehicles.
   - Prescriptive fertiliser programs.
   - Crop yield data and grain marketing
   - Geospatial mapping tools.
4. Savings in operating expenditure from targeted weed and pest management, fertiliser application and reduced fuel and transport costs.

Environmental sustainability by reduction in chemical and fertilisers and increased water use efficiency.

1. Operational efficiencies from greater data storage, bandwidth options, increased data speeds to facilitate the use of robots, drones and computer imaging and integration with analytical tools.

2. Fast and reliable internet and mobile phone coverage are critical for the safe and efficient transportation of key commodities from the wheatbelt such as grain, wool, and mining materials. Real-time communication with drivers, tracking of freight and route optimisation are essential for enhancing productivity, reducing freight and logistics costs, and driving economic growth in the wheatbelt region.

3. Communication during an emergency including:
   - Making calls to 000
   - Emergency services receiving calls to respond to emergencies.
   - Inter-agency communication including voice over internet (VOIP) communication.
   - Sending and receiving community information and emergency warnings.

4. Reduced social isolation from greater connectivity with friends, family and social support networks.

5. Improved health care with better access to telehealth and mental health support services located in metropolitan areas.

6. Additional job and training opportunities enabling young people and families to live and work in rural areas.

7. Greater ability to work from home and access systems remotely, download and upload files and reduce transportation costs as well as improve work life balance.

8. Support education and training programs by increasing the range of subjects available through remote or distance learning.

Please contact me on ██████████ or email ████████████████████ if you require any further information.

Yours Sincerely,

██████████████████

27 May 2024