

## Submission to 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review

### Context:

Our small community in the Loongana Valley, strung out along a single lane dirt road in North Central Tasmania, is costing Telstra a lot of money to patch, repair and maintain a landline, which is unreliable and intermittent. The wire is lying on the ground and subject to constant damage from the weather and wildlife.

We have no mobile coverage, and internet and television access is via satellite. Some of us are 'off grid'. We have poor or no emergency comms during extreme bad weather, and face severe comms risks during catastrophic fire conditions.

We would like to meet with Telstra to offer a community co-design that fixes those issues which can reasonably be fixed, which acts to future-proof telecommunications in the Valley, and which also avoids problems and issues that may not have been considered by Telstra.

### Issues and potential solutions:

While the 'least costs' solution for Telstra may appear to be promoting and part-subsidising residents' shift from landlines to satellite phone services, this potentially presents more problems than it solves. It also presents very real additional costs to some who may not be able to afford them.

Our need for emergency comms means that during crises, power may not be available to run satellite equipment. Those residents who are off grid will be left with few options. If a fire front is advancing, we will also risk not knowing who is where, who has 'left early', where the fire front is, or which direction it is advancing.

While many of us are on one of the Sky Muster internet services, the suggestion we shift to Sky Link raises security issues of a foreign national, Elon Musk, with a variable record on decision-making, having an unhealthy level of control of all regional and rural telecommunications. To increase dependence on Sky Link seems less secure than low orbit satellites owned by the Australian government.

Re. installing wireless broadband and providing mobile phone coverage, the costs would be very high for such a tiny customer base, yet future-proofing now to provide

these options may save money over time. It also makes sense to us that if neighbouring forestry operations have reliable mobile coverage, then it's reasonable our current and future residents also have this level of service – despite the capex.

Our residents include small tourism businesses, which require high levels of reliable comms, especially online. Future businesses and a rising population will need more than an unreliable wire lying in the dirt beside the track, or strung through bushes on the side of the road.

It may be that each resident needs specific comms support for their specific needs, but if we're able to discuss these with Telstra together, I'm confident we can problem-solve in a way that achieves reliable comms for residents, and certainty and future-proofing for Telstra to meet its USO obligations.

Telstra would be welcome to approach us individually, and also as a community via our online community noticeboard -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/446173376283359>

If we can problem-solve our currently intractable issues here together, then it might just be a win-win for all concerned.

Thank you for reading this far. Note: this submission may be made public.

