

## Regional Telecommunication Review

**Submission 20 July 2021**

**Karin Stark, Narromine NSW**

I am writing this submission from my home, an irrigation farm, located 25 minutes south west of Narromine NSW. We have 2,500 hectares used for growing cotton, wheat and barley. I have lived here for 9 years, moving here from London, where I lived and worked for five years, prior to this having grown up and studied in Perth, WA.

Safety concerns are a massive issue for my partner, or contractors who work on the farm. Many areas of the farm have no mobile or internet coverage and the parts that do, are patchy with about one bar of reception. If my partner or any worker on the farm were to have an accident and need urgent help, they would not be able to use their mobile to call for help. This is a matter of life and death and I dread to think of this happening to us or others who have no mobile coverage in a work area like ours. Additionally, if I have an emergency at home, often I can't get through to my partner due to the lack of coverage across our property.

The internet and phone connectivity and reliability has been the biggest challenge for us in trying to conduct a farm business and my own off-farm work over the years. We have spent countless hours on the phone to our internet service providers, switching a few times on the promise of a more reliable internet connection, hours to Telstra trying to fix poor mobile phone coverage, have spoken to local MPs, ombudsman and BIRRR Australia. I have pages and pages of speed tests and ping tests required for a week for when dealing with our internet provider and the NBN. We have spent thousands on repeaters, different NBN equipment, new antennas etc all in the hope of a more reliable internet service. Things seem to forever go around in circles. We have been told various reasons for our poor service but it seems that the existing towers are just overcrowded and the costs are too high to justify updating that equipment. Tall trees blocking access to telecommunication towers have also been a reason cited.

While the internet and phone can work well for a period, there are always lengthy periods of very unreliable phone and internet services. This is incredibly frustrating when you are trying to run a business from home, particularly with the need to use Zoom for meetings due to Covid. I speak on webinars quite often, or run Board meetings and for these very important online events, I need to drive an hour to Dubbo to use a co-working space (and pay \$55) that has very reliable internet services. This is a waste of valuable time to spend two hours travelling. Using a vehicle un-necessarily does nothing for reducing our emissions.

The above provides an outline of the importance of reliable internet and phone services for regional Australians so I will only provide information specifically for the below question.

### Questions

8. How can investment in telecommunications infrastructure work with other programs and policies to encourage economic development in regional Australia?

The NSW Government's Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) includes the building of transmission lines to enable solar and wind farms to connect into the grid and send energy to major load centres. We have the Central West Orana REZ on our doorstep. I have been told that optic fibres can be built on the new transmission towers to increase connectivity and reliability for internet in the bush. This has been put forward as a suggestion but from the discussion I have had with others around this area, a significant benefit for farmers would be a reliable phone and internet service, for the reasons outlined above. Landholders are the most highly

impacted group for the REZs due many reasons, some including the need to build high voltage transmission towers, the visual impacts this has and the visual impact large amounts of solar and wind may also have on a once agricultural landscape. The benefits of the REZs need to target landholders as the most impacted community and reliable internet should be the tangible outcome that's offered.