Submission for the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

3rd August, 2021.

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I wish to submit responses to some of the questions raised in the Regional Telecommunicaitons Review of 2021, mainly in regards to home internet and mobile device communications in my immediate area, Macgregor A.C.T, 2615 – Canberra.

Question 1. What telecommunications services are required in regional Australia to meet current and future needs? Are there any things regional communities and businesses need to do, but can't, on their existing services?

Answer 1. There is increased demand for internet services to run nearly all electronic media and communications devices people use on a daily basis.

- Internet television, which has been surpassing free-to-air television for many years due to it's variety and advanced features, requires a substantial speed to transmit the required video streams.
- Portable computing devices such as laptops are now used by students almost exclusively as the world moves away from paper and pen. These devices are also used for entertainment and when a typical household uses these data-hungry machines simultaneously, fast speed is required to avoid video lag and dropouts.
- Smart devices are now consuming more of our internet data, with things like security camera streaming to mobile phones being just one type of product in the multitude of emerging technologies. We are relying on smart electronics to control so much in the home including lighting, heating, whitegoods and much more. Even being able to get real time data from a home solar system is now possible.

As you can see just from this list, quickly compiled from a short brainstorming session, the demands placed on an internet connection through wired but more frequently wireless connectivity, is growing by the day. Without even looking into the future, data speeds need to be a minimum of 100Mbps, whists at our premises we are currently limited to only 23Mbps.

To answer part two of this question, I will give you an example of something I cannot do with my existing service. Since the impact of Covid-19 in 2020 started to worry business and workers, I was asked by my employer to set up an internet connection at home with which I could access the business' server and login remotely. This was a valid and wise step, considering the lockdown situation we were faced with. However, the infrastructure in our home was found to be insufficient for this to work. Whenever I log in to the work computers from home, I find the lack of speed causes some frustrating lag issues with video and commands. One of my primary roles is to perform AutoCAD drafting, but these internet issues prevent me from working in this capacity from home.

Another problem with the slow internet we have is when everybody tries to use the service at the same time. We can have up to five people trying to do schoolwork, play online games, watch streaming services on television and other important online functions such as paying bills or writing to the government in a Regional Telecommunications Review for example. When this happens, some or all of

us will experience intermittent and inconvenient issues. With the bulk of online activity now being done virtually in cloud services, the loss of internet connection can and has, caused the loss of many hours of work. This is unacceptable that the very government who dictates that things need to be done online, fails to provide the infrastructure to make it possible for its people.

Question 2. What changes in demand, barriers or challenges need to be addressed when it comes to telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia?

Answer 2. The need for faster internet speeds in the home is my biggest challenge right now and I am not even technically in a remote location. Our home was built in 2009 when NBN was being rolled out in greenfield developments. We were in stage two of the West Macgregor development and were hoping that with stage one receiving fibre to the premises [FTTP], we would also enjoy the new technology. We did not however, but instead got a fibre to the node [FTTN] connection with 1 kilometre of copper cable to the nearest NBN pillar. This affected our stage of the development only and future stages were provided with FTTP and faster speeds. We have been desperately trying to improve the speed of our connection with any provider for the last decade unsuccessfully, because the infrastructure is not there and nobody wants to pay for it.

Not only is our internet substandard for current times, but also mobile phone coverage. We have tried all the main mobile phone companies with no success in improving what is a poor signal from the nearest towers. My wife's Vodafone network causes calls to sound scrambled, sometimes do not connect at all and mobile internet speed is varied. My Telstra mobile has poor internet connectivity in the home, with signal strength on 4G down to a mere -115dBm. I have spent hours with technicians trying to fault find, have replaced mobile phones numerous times and after well over five years of complaining, still have no resolution. The provider's have admitted we are in a "black spot" but have offered no alternative or timeframe for improved signals.

Question 3. How have the Government's policies and programs affected telecommunications service outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia? How can these be improved?

Answer 3. The government's policies at the time when NBN was being rolled out, directly affected me as a customer. Due to the "short cuts" of putting a cheaper system in place, namely the FTTN network, the benefits of the high speeds that were supposed to come to Australians were not realised. Still today, over ten years after this infrastructure was built we have not been given a definite date of when the upgrades will come so that we can have the same speed of internet as almost every other Canberran.

Recently there were announcements by the government that those areas who missed out on high speed fibre would be upgraded soon. In the ACT we have seen older suburbs get FTTP before our Macgregor neighbourhood. The latest announcement for Canberra was in May 2021, where Banks, Campbell, Conder, Dickson, Gordon, Hume, Lyneham, O'Connor, Reid, Turner will get upgrades to FTTP. Still nothing for our little black hole in the middle of Macgregor. The only alternative to this issue is mobile internet which we have been trying to rely on as a substitute in peak times of demand. Unfortunately, as I mentioned before in question 2, our mobile reception is not the best so we cannot get better speeds over wireless either. I have communicated with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman about this poor signal strength in 2017, but was told that they "cannot compel a Provider to put infrastructure in place or improve what is there".

These are the issues most relevant to my family and our immediate community area. I sincerely hope that this submission adds weight to my previous efforts through all the available avenues of complaint, in order that our home can access the same internet services which most residents in Canberra have. Further, with any future impacts of Covid-19 causing more home-based study, work and entertainment, the upgrades to our internet and mobile phone services cannot come soon enough. Slow connection speeds are putting my children's education behind that of their peers whilst any work at home scenarios present all manner of problems. There are regional areas in N.S.W who have better telecommunications than we do in dwellings of the capital city of Australia that are only thirteen years old. That is a statement in itself.

Sincerely,

Marko Lehikoinen.

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