

Submission to the Telecommunications Review
Groote Eylandt & Bickerton Island Enterprises Aboriginal Corporation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a Submission for the Telecommunications Review.

Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Enterprises (GEBIE) is a 100% Anindilyakwa owned Not for Profit Charitable organisation registered with the Office Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). We own "For Profit" companies – a four-star resort and a civil/construction company on the Eylandt. Our Group turnover is more than \$35 million and we have a large reserve of \$80 million. Our Rule Book has enshrined social objectives which guides us to protect our Reserve and invest profits back into our three Communities of Angurugu, Umbakumba and Milyakburra (Bickerton Island). There is a large manganese mining company on Eylandt called GEMCO/South32 and a mining town, Alyangula. We are approximately an hour and a half from Darwin by air with a monopoly airline, Air North which is also unreliable.

Groote Eylandt has only one Telco Provider, Telstra for mobile phones. We have access to satellite NBN for fixed phones and internet which is also unreliable. Remote areas are so much more dependent on telecommunications than urban and regional areas because it is a lifeline.

We live in a very remote Community on Groote as do all other Communities in East Arnhem. Telecommunications services need to be reliable ALL the time. We still have many failed calls, distortion, and unreliable service.

Serious issues related to these services:

- Mobile/broadband failures regularly (most recently in June for all of Alyangula for more than a week), no service.
- the promised back-haul to Groote Eylandt and other mainland Communities was meant to be completed a year ago. Very long outages occurred from last December to March this year related to gensets running out of fuel and backup battery failure. Many of those failures lasted longer than one week. You can imagine how this disrupted everything on the Eylandt.
- During Cyclone Alfred a few years ago, in the middle of a military evacuation, Groote Eylandt lost all communication with the outside world for longer than a week.
- We had a very good wet season last year and the Telstra cable under the Angurugu River was damaged when the river flooded. It was left sitting on the side of the river for several weeks before it was repaired.
- Satellite phones do not work well here. Some of the recreation areas do not have any signal and there have been several serious accidents requiring immediate medical attention and Careflight evacuation to Gove or Darwin hospitals. Three years ago, one of our employees was airlifted to Darwin with serious head and limb injuries, nine hours after the initial call was made, hours after the event.
- We have only sketchy communications from Telstra related to the current status of the backhaul rollout. It needs to be completed before the wet season and we need status updates.

Corallie Ferguson
Group CEO