

Please contact Mr Tony Donoghue
Council Ref. TD:GOB:T.02-01, SC412
Your Ref.



7 September 2021

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2021 Regional Telecommunications
Review Secretariat
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Email: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATONS REVIEW 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a Submission in regard to the Telecommunication Services in Regional Australia.

I note with interest in the discussion paper, under the heading 'Adequacy of Mobile Coverage' that it states 99.5 per cent of the Australian population have mobile services available to them. Whilst that implies that nearly everybody is covered in Australia, the reality is that 0.5 per cent equals 1.3 million people who do not get a mobile service. Similarly, the figures of 33 per cent of the Australian land mass are covered by these services is somewhat misleading. I again note that when I look up the Telstra coverage (the major provider out here), it indicates that all of the Coolamon Shire is covered. This is not the case and we have areas with no coverage – or extremely limited, and this coverage seems to have been declining even more over recent times.

We have taken this matter up with our Local Federal Member and I have attached for your information our correspondence, as I think it sums up our concerns and problems about how we as a Nation, are determining and prioritising where coverage will be provided into the future.

At the moment we are relying on private carriers to put forward solutions for locations that improve coverage. These telecommunication companies are focused on profits and return on investment, and therefore make decisions accordingly. Each to their own benefit and not to the improvement of access to the broader community needs. There must be a more structured approach to identifying areas of need and funding infrastructure to increase coverage.

Those that do fall within the stated coverage, but have declining or minimal service, have long delays in their service being rectified or even seen to. We think it is important that a service standard is developed and penalties put in place when Companies cannot meet them. This is similar to the new Public Streetlighting Code in NSW, whereby Industry has agreed to standards around repairs/maintenance and there are penalties for failing to meet them.

Some of these areas are in small communities along important freight or transport routes, or they are associated with farming communities that are important productive regions, (Matong, North and South of Beckom). The response times to these outages cause impacts on business operations, emergency services, community safety, in addition to social issues, such as schooling in the current environment.

We, as a Council ask, that any review of Regional Telecommunications focuses on providing adequate and appropriate coverage to those black or 'brown' spots across Regional Australia. That the focus be on infrastructure that can then provide co-location points for numerous providers.

We believe that extending or improving mobile phone coverage should be the primary focus before agreeing to funding models that encourage competition.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Donoghue', written in a cursive style.

Tony Donoghue
General Manager

Enc

Mr Tony Donoghue

TD:GOB:T.02-01, SC412

30 March 2021

Michael McCormack MP
Deputy Prime Minister of Australia
Member for Riverina
Suite 2/11-15 Fitzmaurice St,
WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650

COPY

Dear Michael

RE: BLACK SPOT PROGRAMME

Council recently held a meeting with Chris Taylor, the Southern Regional General Manager for Telstra, to discuss the general decline in Telstra coverage across our LGA. This result was creating larger areas where coverage dropped out completely. This increase in black spot size within our region was creating areas where farm operations are compromised and potential dangers could not be managed.

A couple of examples of these were the recent Cowabbie fire where contact could not be made to firefighters, and a serious farm incident where the Rescue helicopter was called after the husband had to leave his wife to try and locate coverage.

At this meeting we were advised by Telstra that a black spot is only defined where no coverage by any telecommunications provider existed. This meant that if Optus is provided in an area, no other providers can obtain mobile black spots funding to support an application for improvements.

In rural regions, as you well know, Telstra has the majority of customers and therefore the most common phone held. Are the Federal Government now saying individuals need to own more than one phone in order to ensure maximum or even continual coverage.

Council understand the difference between competition and coverage, however, the Government should be undertaking a more comprehensive review to determine appropriate locations for towers to maximise coverage and then increase co-location requirements. The current situation of individual carriers providing individually specific locations dotted across the country to meet their financial needs only extends the existing black spots and reduces the goal of overall coverage across the region.

From our discussions and research, it appears that there is a road block to moving forward with real solutions.

- The carriers say they need Government funding and co-investment from additional sources to proceed with applications for funding.
- There are restrictions on what will and will not be funded. This changes the carriers approach to funding applications.
- The carriers make business decisions on locations and not on community benefit or broad connectivity. The Telcos are not co-operating in reducing black spots, but rather make decisions to advantage themselves, sometimes to the detriment of competing Telcos.
- Local Government don't know how to facilitate outcomes with the exception of contributing financially to a build, and most often ongoing Asset and maintenance costs.
- The Federal Government are not pro-active in seeking carriers to provide an appropriate Network but are more passive to ideas and solutions from the Telcos, which they base on financial benefit.

The Local Government Area of Coolamon Shire has seen a decrease in coverage, creating larger black spot areas. We would like to support the carriers in improving this service but are struggling to realise how this can be undertaken or achieved.

Council would like the Federal and State Governments focused on providing infrastructure that support coverage across the regional communities. We are not particularly interested in competition between different carriers.

Your help and support in this regard would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Tony Donoghue
General Manager