



10 September 2021

021 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

GPO Box 594

CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Committee Members,

**Australian Government – Regional Telecommunications Review 2021**

**Submission from the Shire of Morawa – Western Australia**

On behalf of the Shire of Morawa, we appreciate the opportunity to provide inputs towards the review of telecommunications services in regional, rural, and remote parts of Australia.

Morawa is a country area situated approximately 4 hours north of Perth and 1.5 hours in land from the nearest regional centre being Geraldton, in the Mid-West Region of WA.

The telecommunications issues being experienced by Morawa's businesses and residents would be similar to those across most of WA's rural locations. In terms of the questions raised on the issue, the Shire has endeavored to prepare general answers that would be relevant to much of our district and community, but we have not canvassed specific inputs to formulate this viewpoint so it can only be given as a general view not an insight into individual experiences.

As telecommunications represent a significant enabler of all aspects of modern life. The Australian Government must make a commitment that no Australian will be left behind when it comes to telecommunications. Telecommunications providers such as Telstra are profit driven and have been proven to inadequately service rural areas where population and demand factors do not align to their profit-making ideology.

In general, the services available to rural areas such as Morawa are a few steps behind regional centres and even further behind the metropolitan areas. This has the knock-on effect of providing a disincentive for business investment in and family relocation to rural areas.

The Universal Services Guarantee is seen as a good thing and should be brought in to cover other telecommunication areas such as mobile services, as well as broadband, as communities are ever more reliant on their mobile phones.



Morawa has recently experienced a natural disaster and it was incredibly evident how reliant our community is on good telecommunications. Most people across the district lost mobile and internet services for at least two (2) days. Telecommunications failing during an emergency made the whole response effort more difficult.

In general, the reliability and uptime of services in the Morawa townsite isn't too bad, but in the more rural areas of the district the access to telecommunications especially phone signal becomes less reliable.

Even in the townsite the reliability of speeds and services change regularly with ageing ADSL infrastructure becoming inadequate for modern demands, and new technologies not yet demonstrating 100% consistency.

Telecommunications infrastructure seems to be heavily reliant on sound power supplies which have been shown to be unreliable across the region. Telecommunications service providers should look to improve their capacity to operate during times of power outages and utilize standalone power initiatives.

Significant improvements should be made to satellite and other alternative wireless internet options to improve access options and the continuation of services even during a disaster event.

The Shire has noticed the use of telecommunications becoming more prevalent in the wake of COVID-19 with the move to more online meetings, online support services, and work from home arrangements introducing a new aspect to rural life. It is envisaged that many of these changes will become embedded long after the pandemic with travel times and resource demands reduced by the application of technology.

Now more than ever the investment in telecommunications infrastructure is needed in regional, rural, and remote areas as people look to move away from metropolitan centres and working remotely has become more normalised for many industries. Mobile and internet accessibility and quality needs to be improved across the regions to allow less populated areas to take advantage of this new opportunity.

Many businesses, especially the farming community, are becoming more reliant on digital driven solutions and systems to improve their business capabilities. The Government should look to release more digital enabling funding opportunities and mechanisms to encourage new investments in technology. Funding and projects at the Government level should also link technology components to other projects such as new or significant building upgrades including receiver or transmitter points, laying fibre under new or resealed roads, public Wi-Fi with community asset investment or other out of the ordinary options. Integrating technology with other funding schemes and projects will help broaden its development across the regions.



Communication is a key component and barrier for remote communities. It is difficult for users to get access to the information they need to appropriately assess their options and opportunities in the market when the access to information is linked to limited telecommunication. Telecommunications providers need to think differently and utilize existing built services like the local post office or shire office to share information.

Whilst as a Shire we can see lots of work has been undertaken in the sphere of telecommunications across the country, the reality is that the implementation and improvements to regional, rural and remote communities like Morawa seem to be lagging behind. In general, the market will always fail to provide adequate services for low population areas like Morawa and it is important that the Government recognizes this failure and acts to rectify this situation. Access to sound telecommunications systems are becoming as important to communities as access to health care and education opportunities, in fact telecommunications is now enabling new ways of accessing these primary services.

The Shire welcomes this review and hopes significant improvements can be made in this area especially in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Kind Regards,

Scott Wildgoose  
**Chief Executive Officer**

