

To Whom it May Concern,

Recently I was made aware of the telecommunications survey. I would like to provide feedback.

Until recently I resided on a remote sheep station roughly 100km from Wilcannia NSW. I have moved to a farm near Rankin's Springs NSW and can provide feedback for both areas. I would like to provide information regarding the experiences I have had with sky muster and phone service.

- Skymuster is significantly more expensive/not comparable to internet/telecommunications in urban areas and the data caps are ridiculous. These caps DO NOT exist for businesses in urban areas.

Data speeds are also not comparable to urban areas. Whilst people are grateful to have any service at all, it's not comparable to the city at all. I cannot understate this. Regional areas are at a continual disadvantage compared to urban areas.

- Every time we had a dust storm, the NBN and mobile phone booster were shorted out on our house. It would take a trip to town to fix the booster (400km one way) or several days if not weeks to get the NBN technician to fix the NBN after dust storms (300km away, limited team servicing a huge area and based in Broken Hill).

- we had to purchase phone boosters for every vehicle and house in order to be connected in the event of something going wrong. This cost \$2000/vehicle or house to do, and should not be our responsibility to allow us to be connected. So for four vehicles and three houses, this was around \$14K and is totally unacceptable and on top of everything else we pay for.

- telstra has a monopoly in the bush and people in rural and remote areas do not have the ability to negotiate phone plans or compare between companies, as telstra is the only phone service provider (optus has some areas but nowhere near as significant as telstra, and if you are travelling, even though the service is terrible, you will wish you had telstra).

- people in rural and remote areas of NSW do not have access to the same data speeds or allowance as those in the city.

- I looked into SpaceX, however did not find that the sustainability and cost of the satellites was reasonable (batteries run out in 5yrs, upfront cost of \$750 for the satellite alone and no help from government, and star gazers have referred to the copious amount of satellites required for this as "light pollution" and inhibiting the view of the night sky, which is a huge tourist drawcard to rural and remote areas.

This is therefore not a viable alternative at this stage, and is disappointing.

- there is no interest from companies or government at this stage to improve regional areas connectivity and no "road map" has been made available for 3G, which is the only service available to me whether at Wilcannia or Rankin's Springs. People dream about 4G "one day maybe we can have 4G / maybe they will get to the tower- but don't hold your breath. We don't get much service from it anyway"

- black spots are incredibly common around Rankin's springs, farmers are very used to being in the black spot "too hard" basket.

- telecommunications and associated technology available in rural and remote areas of NSW are holding businesses back and affecting their competitiveness, as is the high cost associated.

- there should be rebates for phone boosters until the government or relevant providers can cover the rural and remote areas of NSW, as it is not fair to expect farmers to foot the bill for this. Incentives should be made for companies to provide this much needed service in rural and remote NSW.

- I will never forget the death of a truck driver in Merriwagga NSW. He was stung by a bee and anaphylactic, had a passer by try to help him and even though he was in town, he did not have the phone service needed to allow a distress call, which may have saved his life.

- When essential energy had power outages, scheduled or otherwise at Wilcannia, the entire mobile network would be down as well. So you have no landline phone, no mobile phone, and no internet. So no way of calling for help if crisis scenarios occur. I was terrified to leave the house in case something happened in these situations, and I wouldn't have the ability to call anyone during blackouts.

- phone service cuts out about 5km from Rankin's Springs or less as the tower was placed in an inappropriate spot (on a silo), as opposed to a mountain/hill of significant elevation- of which there are plenty at Rankin's springs. Just last weekend there was an accident on the highway within 10km of the township of Rankin's Springs, the driver had to leave a critically injured 13yr old girl and go for a walk uphill towards town to try to get service to call for help. The 13yr old was unable to be saved. Would this have changed if the driver had been able to call for help?

How many people have to die in rural or remote areas before we get reliable phone service in excess of 5km out of town?

- In countries such as Estonia, phone service is a human right. Why is this not the case in Australia? Why are rural and remote areas totally disadvantaged compared to the city?

- farmers are becoming increasingly tech savvy. It is no longer an excuse to say that farmers are backwards. Farmers love Twitter, connectivity is so important in regional and remote areas for mental health and telehealth- and yet we have to fight for it and spend so much money to have access to these services in our homes and vehicles. It is disgusting.

- also, it has taken COVID to allow Telehealth to occur as commonplace in areas such as Wilcannia. We suddenly had access to Telehealth we could not have dreamt of before. Also zoom meetings and zoom calls were "enabled" allowing businesses to be run more effectively. Opportunities existed universally that never did prior to covid.

Why did it take COVID for this to happen? Education and health outcomes could be improved significantly if these services were to be improved. It was not a known thing to ask for these services prior to covid as they did not exist in the capacity they exist now.

Telecommunication needs to be significantly improved in order to continue this positive trend.

From my experience across regional and remote NSW, it is fair to say that current telecommunication services hold the people, health and businesses in these areas back. Improvements are desperately needed, and while everyone is grateful for what they have, this

gratitude exists as they are used to having nothing. In fact, this is what they expect, which is incredibly disappointing.

Kindest Regards,

