

Dundee Beach is a region located approximately 160 kilometres by road from Darwin in the Northern Territory.

It has a permanent population of between 600 -800 people with an age demographic of predominantly of 50–70-year-olds. There is a small school with about 20 students of various ages, a lodge and a caravan park and numerous fishing charter companies. There are three other fishing and accommodation facilities in the region. Tourism and fishing are the two main industries in the Dundee area.

On weekends the population can swell to up the 3000 people with caravaners, campers and weekenders all flocking to Dundee for the fishing, the boating and the camping. It has in many ways become Darwin's playground. The NT Government has over the past 10 years installed electricity to the region and sealed the main road to Dundee including the construction of bridges but in many ways, Dundee has been left to its own devices. It is not in a Local Govt Area. The NT Government provide whatever amenities it can but they fall well short of what is required.

The installation of electricity and the sealing of the road has seen more people move into the area and place added pressure on a range of areas from Health, Emergency Management and of course Communications.

With only a small mobile phone tower that only just pokes over the tree tops in the Dundee Beach area and another tower some 30 kilometres away telecommunications are difficult at the best of times. It is especially difficult when an additional 2000 people arrive from Darwin for a long weekend when the added pressure of these people throws the whole system into melt down, not just for telephone calls but also for data usage as well for the entire weekend.

With tourist numbers now swelling prolifically in the Northern Territory due to COVID and the lockdowns in various states, Dundee has become a popular destination for those grey nomads with caravans and camper trailers. They have been staying longer than the weekend and, in many cases, have remained at Dundee for a couple of months in areas where free camping is permissible. All have mobile phones and computers and speak to their families down south regularly. All of this is to the detriment of the people who actually reside in the area who find it difficult to make even a local call.

This is especially serious in the event of a health emergency as there are no health facilities anywhere in Dundee apart from two telehealth machines which are all but useless due to the unreliability of the Telstra phone and data system. The nearest doctor/nurse is almost 100 kilometres away so hence the importance of the telehealth machines.

The people of Dundee rely on emergency health response services from Darwin by either air ambulance or road ambulance and the only way to contact them is by phone. Depending on where one makes the call from will depend on whether or not contact can be made. The Region is riddled with black spots that are incapable of picking up a signal.

A recent incident where a woman had a stroke at home in the Dundee Downs area was made even worse when her husband tried to make contact with "000" but was unable to get a signal. He had to bundle her into his car and drive to the local motel where they also could not make contact on their mobile phone even though they were only a kilometre from the nearest mobile phone tower. The motel had to revert to the land line which is just as unreliable, to get the Ambulance to attend.

Reporting a snake bite, vehicle crash or fire can be just as frustrating. Dundee is a Rural area with large bush acreage throughout the region. In the event of a fire, it is important to get the Bush Fire

Volunteers out early to fight the fire in order to reduce its spread and damage. The Dry season vegetation in the Top End around the Dundee region is especially dry and it can be very windy, and the lack of telephone reception in large parts of the Dundee Region is real cause for concern.

This fact is further compounded during the Wet Season due to the Monsoonal storms and tropical Cyclones that occur in the region at this time of the year. Communication is vital for all residence at this time of the year especially if a cyclone is approaching the area. Often residents are unable to get accurate information via data/internet signals through the NBN satellite due to heavy cloud cover as most people in the region rely on NBN via satellite. This is really important as the nearest cyclone shelter to Dundee is at Berry Springs, 90 kilometres away with at least three bridge crossings, one of which goes under water during heavy rains that are accompanied with high tides. With this in mind, timely information is vital and most can't get any information as they can't access a telephone signal.

The local community need to be prepared for any emergency and most people have a plan on how they will react in the event of an emergency, but each of those plans rely on accurate and timely information. Without it, they have no plan. Just as the Dundee region does not have its own Disaster Plan. If it had a half decent communication system the people of Dundee would be in a far better position to help themselves and it would solve a lot of their issues.

Telephone black spots, of which there are many in the Dundee region, constant issues with landlines failing, poor data access. Unable to get NBN signal through heavy cloud. No signal due to heavy phone traffic by tourists and weekenders. Poor or no access to health care facilities, poor communication to and for emergency services. Emergency management plans in disarray due to lack of communications.

Every issue the Dundee Region have, would almost resolve itself if it had better communications. The health issues would not go away; however, they would be improved, the Emergency Response and Management issues for Police, Fire and Ambulance as well as Emergency Services would also be dramatically improved. The development of better Emergency and Disaster Planning through improved communications will improve access to cohesive risk information. Safety issues for the local community and fishermen and tourists alike would help Dundee become a place where people want to come too and perhaps settle. The need to obtain important weather information in a timely fashion would be realised and community Emergency plans could be relied upon.

Better communications would provide opportunities that would allow communities, individuals and small business to make informed decisions regarding investment opportunities in the region in the knowledge that their business would not be held to ransom at the whim of a fluky mobile phone service that will enable EFTPOS machines and data to work when they are supposed to.

Dundee is a very fast developing region of the Northern Territory. It is developing faster than perhaps the NT Government realise and consequently we have been left behind in a number of areas. It is my hope that with improved communications provided by the Commonwealth, the NT Government may just have to rethink its strategy with regard to Dundee.

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