

Regional Telecommunications Review Submission

15 September 2021

My husband and I run a Sheep farm and contracting business in regional Western Australia. We are situated halfway between Kojonup and Boyup Brook (38 kms from Kojonup and forty-six kms from Boyup Brook). Telecommunications have been inadequate since we moved to our current location at the beginning of 2001 and has been an ongoing source of frustration.

Currently we are connected to the internet via satellite NBN. We originally had dial up internet connected through the phone line and then a portable Wi-Fi device for several years. The connection is constantly dropping out. When trying to do the bookwork for the business on the computer I am having to reconnect the computer and printer/scanner regularly throughout a session. There have many been times when I have not been able to complete tasks at a given time due to poor internet connection and have had to come back to it at another time when the connection is better. In our contracting business we often need to scan and email documents to our clients. Sometimes documents need to be sent within a time frame. This has caused a lot of unnecessary stress due to having to reconnect the scanner and computer to the internet and waiting for a strong enough signal to complete the task. More institutions are making it necessary to use the internet as part of their operations i.e., internet banking, online submissions and forms, Medicare etc. Where is the improvement in Telecommunications services to keep up with these new business models?

We also have a telephone connected via NBN satellite. We over from changed from the land line connection about a year ago as it was expensive, and the lines are so old that every time we had heavy rain the lines would crackle for weeks and cut out. We have this connected as an emergency back up as our mobile phone coverage is so poor in the house. Of course, if the power fails or the internet connection is down then we lose this method of communication as well. We do not use the phone connected to NBN satellite for general phone calls as the delay is so bad that it is difficult to have a conversation and very frustrating.

Mobile phone coverage in the house/office is grossly inadequate. My husband and I are both with Boost Mobile which uses Telstra mobile phone towers. The phone will sometimes ring in the house but if we try to answer the calls the line just drops out. This means that we need to run outside with the phone to answer it. The same applies to making phone calls. We need to stand outside and away from the house to be able to make a phone call. I am lucky if I can get more than one signal bar on my phone. There was an occasion in the middle of Winter when I had to wait outside in 12 Degrees Celsius for a phone appointment with my doctor while I had Bronchitis because it was the only place, I could find a phone signal. The Doctor was running late, and I had to wait 40 minutes out in the cold whilst sick. It is impossible if there is a problem where I need my accountant to talk me through something on the computer as I am unable to be in my office, at my computer and be on a phone call at the same time. My husband and I have tried many different mobile phones to see if we could find one that has a stronger receptivity.

While we were in Covid lockdown in 2020 my son had to home school for six weeks. He was not able to attend many of the Zoom lessons that he was supposed to due to internet

connectivity issues and he had to fit his study times around internet supply. This caused a lot of stress in an already stressful situation.

The issues with phone and internet connection cause myself and my husband frustration and inconvenience daily. Every time I need to spend time in the office doing bookwork for the business, I feel dread as, invariably I end up unable to complete the tasks that I need to and spend a lot of time turning everything on and off again and reconnecting the internet and office equipment. It has gotten so bad that I have often suggested to my husband that it is time to sell the farm, close the business and move on.

On a personal level, I am concerned that if there were an emergency, we may not be able to communicate our need for assistance. Likewise, if someone needed our assistance would we be able to be contacted. Every year there are fires in the region that we need to be aware of. Several years ago, a man died after a motor bike accident on a farm very close to us as he did not have mobile service to be able to access help. There was a petition made by this man's fiancé for the government to address the black spot issues in the region. I, among many others signed this petition yet we have not seen any evidence that the government is trying to address these issues. We pay more for our internet connection than people in cities and regional centres yet have caps on the amount of data that we can use and an internet supply that is unreliable.

I implore the government to take the Telecommunications issues of regional Western Australians seriously. We need to have access to reliable internet and phone connection at an affordable cost for the sake of the smooth and efficient running of our businesses, our access to assistance in emergency or time critical situations and for our personal comfort of being able to communicate outside of our isolated living situations from the comfort of our home.

Yours sincerely

Nina Hart

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