

## Regional Telecommunications Review

### East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey report

The East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EKCCI) recently provided our members the opportunity to be surveyed for the Regional Telecommunications review. Due to the timing of the survey, which fell over the peak period in the East Kimberley, as well as the number of questions posed, there was not as much uptake as we would have hoped. We know many of our businesses are time poor, therefore as their peak body we wanted to ensure the voice of the East Kimberley Business community is heard on this issue.

The EKCCI created an abbreviated version of the larger Regional Telecommunications Review Survey and asked our members to complete the survey. We have collated responses and believe it provides an accurate snapshot of the effect and impact telecommunication issues has on the East Kimberley business community.

We had twenty responses (16.4% of our member base), these came from various businesses across multiple industries in the East Kimberley.

We have collated all responses and provided detail relating to mobile, landline, broadband internet, satellite phone, satellite internet.

## Executive Summary

A lack of consistent mobile and Broadband internet significantly impacts the ability of businesses in the East Kimberley region to operate day to day. During the dry season (May to September) when our population doubles, the system is overwhelmed and affects the ability of businesses to effectively run point of sale, EFTPOS, reservations and booking, bookkeeping, accounting and communications. Unfortunately, even when the system is not overloaded in the off season, it is often hampered by weather issues. Businesses have reported issues with telecommunications affecting their operations year-round.

Major issues also occur with security systems where security and CCTV are monitored has to be outsourced to Perth in order to operate effectively, schools in the region are unable to effectively monitor students or operate using technology, which puts the children in their care at a disadvantage. Additionally, the hospital system and the health and safety of our residents is continually at-risk based on emergency calls not connecting, ambulance communication networks not working, and patient recording on iPad not working.

A lack of consistent internet service has also created major issues in terms of people's ability to use the SafeWA app. The data simply will not load; therefore, the State Government system is virtually useless in Kununurra and surrounding areas.

Despite an increase of 70% use of Zoom, and a 50% increase in digital services like telehealth and working from home, mobile and broadband internet has a very low level of satisfaction in this region.

In terms of mobile accessibility, over 70% of respondents reported this as 'very poor' across a number of factors, and 88% of respondents are dissatisfied with the level of service they receive. The download speed is 1/7<sup>th</sup> the rate of the national average and the upload speed is 1/3<sup>rd</sup>.

In terms of fixed broadband internet, only 22% of respondents are happy with the level of internet they have to run their business. Some report having to send all staff to work from home despite multiple attempts to rectify the situation. The download speed for broadband internet in the East Kimberley region is less than half the speed of the national average.

## KEY FINDINGS

We asked businesses to provide some narrative to highlight how Telco communications affects their business in the East Kimberley, the major issues are outlined below.

- The School with high school age students relies heavily on technology, any communications blackouts or difficulties can be a severe risk to the safety of children in their care.
- Many businesses systems are cloud-based, and often have to use mobile phones when computers can't get access. This creates multiple issues because they are unable to do Teams calls on mobile phones and they cannot access files on 4G.  
*One business is in the process of "replacing the NBN connection at our office, due to the continued miscommunication between NBN and Telstra the connection has been repeatedly delayed. We had hoped they could make do with a 4G hotspot in their office, but it has been completely unworkable. As a result, we have had to leave the office unattended for the past four weeks while everyone works from home."*
- Bookkeeping, product research/ordering and communications services are severely affected due to only having satellite internet service available. This means information sharing, cloud-based accounting and taxation reporting as well as banking/accounting issues exist as a result. Service can be lost altogether due to cloudy weather.
- Radio and communication networks are often affected, which is IP based and requires a decent signal to work effectively.
- CCTV and Alarm Monitoring is outsourced to a 3rd party provider outside of the region, due to unreliable Internet and Phone connections.
- Telecommunications issues in town creates significant safety issues, including emergency calls via mobile phones not connecting, ambulance communication networks not working, and patient recording on iPad can be affected. One response stated, *"we use iPads for patient reports Back to SOC (State operations Centre), we use the internet in all ambulances to receive contact, log call outs also for our Duress system - it is vital that we have good internet and mobile Phone coverage."*
- Many businesses reported major issues with their point of sale, EFTPOS and systems because they are all internet based. When there is an outage, many businesses simply cannot trade. These outages are much more common from November to March. When we have more rain and weather events.
- During the Dry season, there are no weather events, however due to the influx in tourists, internet remains very slow due to an inability for the system to cope. Many businesses reported this as being very frustrating as they need their internet systems, such as EFTPOS, cloud-based email, reservations, on-line bookings, and accounting and banking the most during the tourist season when business is at its peak for the year.  
*One Business reported that during the peak business season, telecommunications issues "impacts severely on our effectiveness to be efficient and professional, when several of these fail, then it is costly to the overall functioning of our business - both financially and in doing everyday activities. Basically - my business fails to survive without telco communications."*

- Many businesses reported that when working in the field, the internet is extremely slow or non-existent and makes accessing information very difficult and sometimes impossible.
- Mobile reception is very poor in many parts of Kununurra, there are frequent dropouts and an inability to download and email.

Finally, many of our respondents noted that the lack of consistent internet service created a major issue in terms of people’s ability to use the SafeWA app. The data simply will not load; therefore, the State Government system is virtually useless in Kununurra and surrounding areas.

### Blackspots in Kununurra

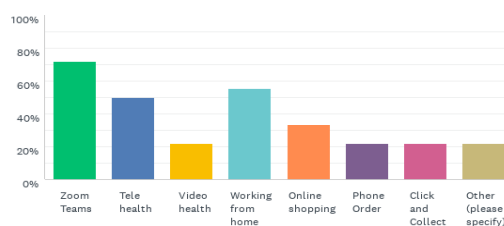
We provided our member businesses an opportunity to report blackspot in the township of Kununurra, their responses were many and varied, including:

- There is no reception regularly or only a single bar reception at the Aboriginal Student Hostel. When there are a lot of people in town, mobile data is incredibly slow.
- Behind Kelly's Knob. During past three months, you could almost call the entire Kununurra and Lake Argyle Resort area a black spot from a data access perspective and phone dropouts.
- Hidden Valley - Weaber Plain Road, Kununurra WA. All of Wyndham WA and Halls Creek WA.
- Pardalote Close, Kununurra WA.
- Weaber Plains Road, Kununurra WA.
- Hidden Halley /Weaber Plain Road, Kununurra WA.
- Pardalote Close, Kununurra WA.
- Cocus Way, Kununurra WA.
- Pardalote Close, Kununurra WA.
- Lot 255 Packsaddle Road, Kununurra WA.
- Cocus Way, Light Industrial Area, Weaber Plain Road, Kununurra WA.
- Packsaddle Road is a blackspot in many areas despite being very close to Kununurra township.
- Hidden Valley Area, Kununurra WA.
- The Kununurra Industrial area, Poincettia way to Mulligans Lagoon Road, Kununurra WA.
- 528 Riverfarm Road, Kununurra WA
- Packsaddle Road, Kununurra WA.

### The impact of COVID on Telecommunications in the East Kimberley

All respondents to our survey reported that their use of technology changed dramatically as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, 76% reported an increased use of Zoom, and 50% reported an increase need for digital services as a result of working from home and tele-health appointments.

Q2 How did the use of digital services change for regional consumers and businesses during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?



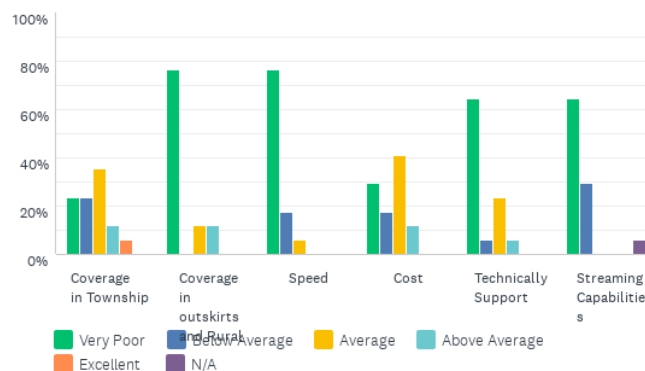
## MOBILE phones

An overwhelming 95% of respondents utilise Telstra as their main mobile provider. Of all respondents surveyed, 12% reported that their mobile accessibility in the East Kimberley was suitable to their needs which leaves a staggering 88% reporting that it is not.

The following is a graph outlines the results when respondents were asked to rate their current Mobile Provider, across a range of factors including:

- Coverage in township
- Coverage in outskirts and rural
- Speed
- Cost
- Technical support
- Streaming capabilities

**Q7 Please rate your current Mobile TelCo Provider.**

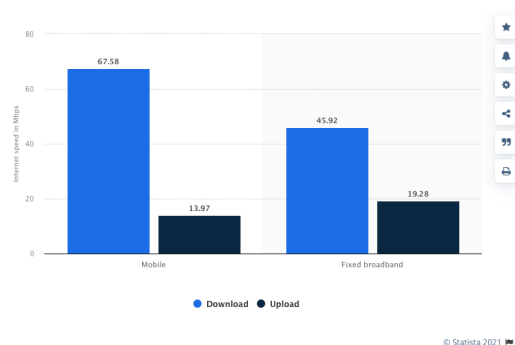


As you can see, ‘very poor’ was the overwhelming response across four factors, including coverage in outskirts and rural (76.47%), Speed (76.47%), Technical support (64.71%) and streaming capabilities (68.75). Of the 72% of respondents answered an average of ‘Very poor’ across 4 of the criteria. Only 1 respondent reported excellent coverage.

The majority of responses relating to the other two criteria – coverage in the township and cost were rated as average to very poor.

This demonstrates a strong dissatisfaction with the Mobile Telco providers in the East Kimberley.

Research shows that in May 2020, the average mobile internet download speed in Australia was 67.58 Mbps for downloads and 13.97 for uploads. Please see the table below sources from Statista.com.



We asked all our respondents to run a speed test on their mobile. The average speed of our respondents’ mobiles was a dismal 9.32mbps for downloads and 3.98mbps for uploads, far below the national average. This means that businesses in the East Kimberley are attempting to operate their

businesses with a download speed that is 1/7<sup>th</sup> the rate of the national average and the upload speed is 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the national average.

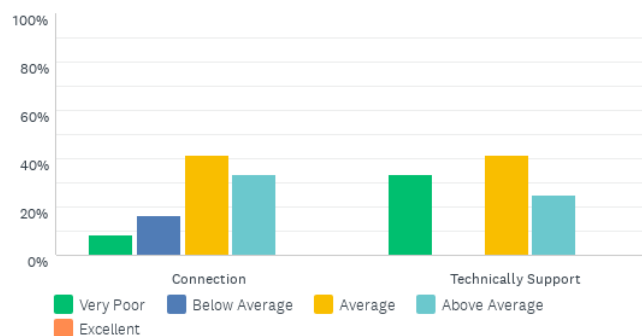
## Landline

We asked our members who their landline provider is, 50% of respondents reported Telstra to be their provider, followed by 18% iiNet and a further 32% 'other'.

The following is a graph outlines the results when respondents were asked to rate their current Landline Provider, across a range of factors including:

- Connection
- Technical support

### Q11 Please rate your current Landline Provider.



In terms of connection for landlines, 75% reported this as being average or above average, and 25% reported connections issues as below average or poor.

In regard to receiving technical support, 33% reported this as being 'very poor', while 66% reported the support service as average or above.

Overall, 54.7% of respondents reported landline services did meet their accessibility needs, while 53% reported that it did not meet their needs.

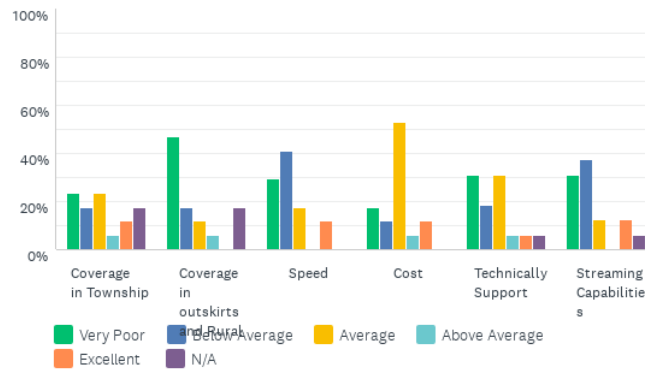
## Internet Broadband

The main provider of Broadband internet in the East Kimberley is Telstra with 53% of respondent reporting they utilised their services for their internet needs, followed by iiNet (30%), and 17% 'other'.

When asked to rate their Internet service provider, over 70% of respondents reported average, poor or very poor against all criteria, with speed and streaming capabilities scoring the worst with up to 70% reported as 'below average' or a 'very poor' outcome.

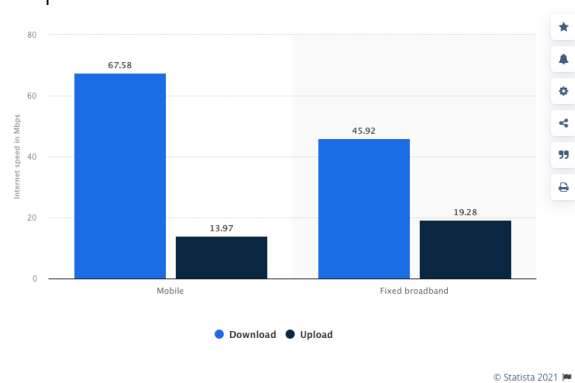
Please see graph below.

## Q14 Please rate your current Internet Provider.



The above results indicate significant issues with broadband internet services in the East Kimberley region, to quantify this we asked our members whether their current internet accessibility met their needs, 82% of respondents reported that it does not meet their needs.

To demonstrate the level of disadvantage this can place on our region, the graph below depicts findings from Statista.com, the average fixed internet download speed in Australia was 45.92 Mbps for downloads and 19.28 for uploads.

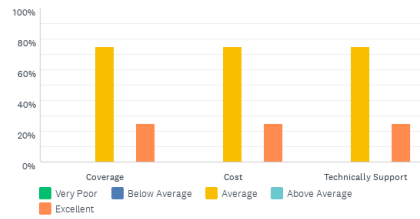


We asked all our respondents to run a speed test on their fixed Broadband Internet. The average speed of our respondents' fixed broadband internet was a dismal 23.50 Mbps for downloads and 18.66 Mbps for uploads. While the uploads speed is only just below the national average, the download speed is far below the national average with a speed less than half that of the national average.

## Satellite phone provider

Not all people surveyed owned a satellite phone, of those who do there are various providers listed. For those businesses who reported using a satellite phone, 71% reported being happy with the level of accessibility related to this. When asked to rate coverage, cost and technical support the findings were acceptable with average through the excellent satisfaction reported.

Q19 Please rate your current Satellite Phone Provider.



### Satellite internet provider

Not all people surveyed use satellite internet, of those who do there are various providers listed. The ratings against the following areas of consideration were very mixed:

- Coverage in township
- Coverage in outskirts and rural
- Speed
- Cost
- Technical support
- Streaming capabilities

Please see the graph below. Coverage in town using satellite internet was excellent, however would be a more costly solution for businesses. Every other factor warranted a very mixed response, some businesses reporting very poor outcomes through to excellent. This demonstrates the lack of consistency between providers, service and location.

Q22 Please rate your current Satellite Internet Provider.

