Gidgegannup Progress Association (Inc.)

Working with the Community – For the Community

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secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

Dear Sirs,

Re. The 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review
Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this Review.

In response to the Queries in the Issues Paper:

1. **What telecommunications services are required in regional Australia to meet current and future needs? Are there any things regional communities and businesses need to do, but can't, on their existing services?**

Gidgegannup has a very poor land line network and limited ADSL service.   We rely heavily on mobile phone towers both Telstra and NBN to provide our coverage, together with Skymuster.   Because of our hilly terrain the fixed wireless service is not always reliable and in places extremely poor. This makes it difficult for businesses to operate efficiently.   The criticism of the satellite service is that it does not provide the speeds required for efficient downloads and uploads and data packages are expensive. We also have frequent power outages as our power is delivered by an overhead network.   It would appear that the LEOSatellites might be the answer to this particularly in emergency situations.

2. **What changes in demand, barriers or challenges need to be addressed when it comes to telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia**?

Terrain and distance.

3. **How have the Government's policies and programs affected telecommunications service outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia? How can these be improved?**

The mobile black spot programme has been of assistance but still several areas particularly in the more remote parts of Gidgegannup still suffer very poor coverage.   More towers do not seem to be the answer. Greater speeds on satellite services and improved data packages.

4. **How do service reliability issues impact on regional communities and businesses? How do outages, including in natural disasters, impact on communities and businesses?**

The internet and mobile phone coverage is vital to our community and businesses.   When these services are down the businesses can't operate efficiently.   Possibly more education is needed as to "gadgets" that can be used to improve communications in these times and maybe some financial support for those affected.   Without these services the community is virtually cut off as our land line networks are extremely poor.   This is very evident in times of emergencies such as the recent Wooroloo Bush Fire when the impacted area was without telecommunications before, during and after the fire.   This also impacted the Emergency Services ability deal with the Bushfire.   It was an extremely dangerous and stressful situation for this community and those trying to help us.   There are also significant safety issues on our remote roads in this farming community.

5.   How might such impacts be addressed to ensure greater reliability? How can the network resilience be addressed in regional areas?
Provision of back up batteries with a much longer life to all towers and exchanges in areas such as this.   Also back up generators that will switch over automatically.   Telecommunications are vital in Emergency situations.

6. How did the use of digital services change for regional consumers and businesses during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? What insights for future service delivery does this provide?
Many more people were working for homes and needed increased data packages and speeds.   Something our towers found it difficult to cope with.   Also online education and data requirements for streaming during lock down.   Telstra's assistance on this was good but many people could not access a reliable and efficient signal.

7. What can be done to improve the access and affordability of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities?
These communities are probably never going to be commercially viable.   They will need Government support to provide a reliable and efficient service.

8. How can investment in telecommunications infrastructure work with other programs and policies to encourage economic development in regional Australia?
Reliable and efficient telecommunication services would greatly assist small business in this area and support agricultural and tourism businesses.   Thus providing increased employment and assist the local economy.

9.   What role could innovation, including new models, alternative investors or new ways of doing business, play to encourage investment in regional telecommunications infrastructure? What are the barriers?
Cost and possibly the need for a centralised business centre for locals to use in smaller centres. There would also need to be an education programme for some.

10.   To what extent will new technologies enable significant change to the delivery of telecommunications services in regional Australia over the next 5-10 years? Are there any barriers to accessing these technologies?
New technologies should be able to deliver significant change.   The barriers are cost and education and availability to non-commercial areas.

11. How can Government better support the rapid rollout of and investment in new telecommunications solutions in regional areas?

This again comes down to financial support for the rollout and possibly the sourcing of investment partners to fund this roll out.

12. How can different levels of Government, the telecommunications industry and regional communities better co-ordinate their efforts to improve telecommunications in regional Australia?
By working together and extensive consultation so the expectations of all parties can be accommodated.   Regional/Rural Working parties/committees with representation from those who have an interest in this happening for the benefit of everyone.

13.   What changes to Government investment programs are required to ensure they continue to be effective in delivering improved telecommunications?
Ensure that those programs are targeting those in most need.   Government representatives would be aware of the need in particular areas.   This need should be targeted as a multi-level Government initiative.

14.   How can regional consumers be better supported to identify, choose and use the best connectivity options for their circumstances, as well as to understand and use their consumer rights?
Possibly more information available on industry and Government websites.

15.   To what extent is public information on connectivity options, including predictive coverage data and speeds, sufficient to help regional customers make informed decisions? What other information is needed?
The average rural/regional customer is relatively unaware of this information. Maybe information via Telecommunication companies, media outlets and social platforms.

16.   What other matters should the Committee consider in its review and why are they important?
Reliability of power support, effect of demand for data via streaming platforms.   Some indication of what demand there is from those working and being educated from home and how this will grow.

Regards

Sally Block
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