

To: [secretariat@rtirc.gov.au](mailto:secretariat@rtirc.gov.au)

From: R. Proudfoot (email - [REDACTED])

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## Introduction

The **Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group** (subsequently referred to as the Group) resulted from a community initiative that began after a well-attended forum in Maleny in June 2021. The forum was convened to hear real cases of internet failure as a result of the NBN rollout in our Region in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland. The meeting heard from representatives from the NBN (Mr Marcello Massi) and the Federal Government (Mr Andrew Wallace, MP) and concluded that something needed to be done to ensure that thousands of householders in our Region would not lose a reliable connection to the internet as a result of the NBN rollout.

The Group has prepared our submission on behalf of the Regional Community of Maleny and includes a sample of letters of support from local businesses, local householders, the Sunshine Coast Council and the Maleny Chamber of Commerce.

The Group has flagged serious obstacles that prohibit high-speed, reliable and resilient broadband and mobile networks in our Region.

We have attempted to answer questions and raise issues in order for the RTIRC to best address the Terms of Reference as outlined in Appendix B of the Issues Paper. In doing so it has become clear to us that our Region offers exactly the type of poor telecommunications situation that the RTIRC was set up to examine and hopefully improve. We list a summary in relation to the 8 points in the Terms of Reference here:

1. Telecommunications in our Region are seriously inadequate.
2. Our residents in the main do not have equitable access to telecommunications services in the way that most parts of Australia do.
3. We would welcome public consultation with members or delegates of the RTIRC.
4. Government policy for improving connectivity in our Region has been a failure.
5. We welcome new investment for telecommunications in our Region in order to support the government's decentralisation plan for Northern Australia.
6. We hope that our telecommunications issues are included in the RTIRC's recommendations to the Federal Government.
7. We anticipate that our Region will meet the criteria that shows that the Benefits of improving our telecommunications will significantly outweigh the costs.
8. We look forward to a good outcome as a result of the Report being forwarded to the Minister for Regional Communications.

It should also be mentioned that numerous letters written by members of our community as well as members of this Group to appropriate authorities pointing out the inadequacy of the NBN rollout in particular, have been poorly addressed or not responded to at all.

Letters have been sent to:

- the Minister for Telecommunications, Hon Paul Fletcher (issues not addressed)
- the NBN's Mr Gavin Williams, Chief Development Officer, Regional and Remote (no response)
- the Federal member for Fisher, Mr Andrew Wallace (issues not addressed)
- the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (no response)
- the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (issues not addressed).

## Telecommunication Issues for Maleny and Surrounding Districts

We note that the government has announced the effective completion of the NBN rollout. This is unfortunate as this announcement comes at a time where the NBN's two technologies for our Region (Fixed Wireless and Satellite Muster) are shown to be grossly inadequate, forcing hundreds of households to cling to their aging ADSL technology as their only means of connecting to the internet. While 4G and 5G mobile networks have been touted by the Federal Government as possible means of internet connectivity, serious problems due to the vegetation and topography of our region mean that this type of technology does not offer anything like a reliable connection. So with no guarantee of reliable 4G/5G internet connectivity, no reliable satellite connectivity and no reliable Fixed Wireless connectivity, many in our Region face an uncertain future of not having any internet connectivity except the aging ADSL technology (which has a limited lifetime).

In addressing these issues, we have tried where possible to answer the questions listed in Appendix A of the Issues paper. (Where we have not addressed the question, it is because it didn't apply to us).

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?*

Because of weather and topography, many people in Maleny don't have reliable radio signal, mobile phone signal or TV signal. They rely on the internet for these by using radio and TV streaming and Wi-Fi boosting to make mobile phone calls.

Increasingly more and more government, commerce and banking services are only available online. And critically, in the event of natural disasters such as bushfires, our emergency radio bulletins and warnings are dependent on a reliable internet. So, if we don't have reliable high-speed internet, we lose radio, TV and mobile phone services as well as the ability to work or run businesses from home (something much more in demand due to COVID-19).

Because hundreds of households in our Region have not got and cannot get an NBN connection, they are relying on the aging ADSL infrastructure for internet. If Telstra decide to no longer support ADSL, hundreds, if not thousands of people will lose their internet connection.

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

In the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, because we cannot get a reliable internet connection using Fixed Wireless or Satellite, we need to have the FTTN infrastructure extended in areas where it was not implemented. This includes most of the Hinterland that does not lie in the Central Business Districts (CBD) of towns. Maleny is a good example. Only the CBD was given FTTN. Many of our non-CBD streets run along ridge lines or in the floor of valleys and cannot get a fixed wireless connection. We would like to see the FTTN infrastructure run along these streets in just the same manner as it was implemented in all of Australia's capital cities and large towns. Concomitantly, we would like to see more NBN towers erected so that we can ALL get a good wireless connection. Satellite is not a good alternative because of our inclement weather (highest rainfall in Qld after the Far North along with significant winds).

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

Government's policy has demonstrably had an adverse affect on telecommunications in our region. See answer to Q2 above.

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

Service reliability since the rollout of NBN has been poor. Businesses by their very nature, suffer the most. Their EFTPOS and Credit Card scanners often fail at peak times. Those who rely on satellite get connection failures every time the weather worsens. Those who have NBN running over aging copper wire (FTTN), experience failures that are related to the poor and aging state of the cabling. Those who cannot get NBN and still rely on ADSL get failures that relate to the poor and aging state of the copper cabling.

As mentioned in our answer to Question 1, because of weather and topography, many people in Maleny don't have reliable radio signal, mobile phone signal or TV signal. They rely on the internet for these by using radio and TV streaming and Wi-Fi boosting to make mobile phone calls. In the event of natural disasters such as bushfires, our emergency radio bulletins and warnings are dependent on a reliable internet. So, if we don't have reliable high-speed internet, we lose radio, TV and mobile phone services and therefore are put in a very vulnerable position.

- 5. How might such impacts be addressed to ensure greater reliability? How can the network resilience be addressed in regional areas?*

Extending the FTTN infrastructure to streets that are not in the CBD and eliminating satellite as a viable technology for our Region would provide a massive boost to access and reliability. Then, as is the case in Australia's large towns and cities, those who want to pay extra for an upgrade to faster and more reliable fibre can get it. Replacing the old

copper cable with fibre would go a long way to addressing network resilience in regional areas.

*8. How can investment in telecommunications infrastructure work with other programs and policies to encourage economic development in regional Australia?*

The coastal city of Maroochydore is less than 50 kms from most of our residential areas. To great fanfare, the second high-speed fibre connector cable that connects Australia to the rest of the world was successfully put into service there recently. This should have meant unparalleled internet connectivity to the rest of the world and a boon for business on the Sunshine Coast and Hinterland. However, the Hinterland's poor internet means that we cannot take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity. If the Hinterland's internet connectivity were improved, by being able to tap into this world-leading resource in Maroochydore, this Region would have the potential to be a 'Silicon Valley' for start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures.

*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?*

Large parts of Maleny and surrounding districts have to rely on aging ADSL technology (maximum speed around 12mbps) and poor satellite technology (maximum effective speed around 25mbps) for their internet connection. It is a well-known rule in computer science that computing power doubles every 18 months. So it is inevitable that our poor internet connection will see many in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland effectively lose their connection to the internet purely through technology obsolescence. As the world moves to internet connection speeds of 100mbps plus, Maleny and districts users will be locked into impossibly slow connections.

The main barrier to accessing newer connection technologies is Federal Government (i.e. NBN Co) policy that stopped rural Australians in regional towns from getting access to the foundational infrastructure that Australians in the cities have i.e. FTTN.

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

- a. Continue to rollout FTTN to the non-CBD streets in country towns. Then selectively upgrade to fibre (replace all aging copper) where appropriate.
- b. Install more NBN towers so that all houses in country towns can get a direct line of sight to a tower (a must for effective Fixed Wireless connections).

*12. How can different levels of Government, the telecommunications industry and regional communities better co-ordinate their efforts to improve telecommunications in regional Australia?*

There has to be an acknowledgement by all layers of government that the Regions are the emerging powerhouse of the Australian economy. Covid has fast-tracked this.

Here is an example: coastal businesses on the Sunshine Coast are in a good position to benefit significantly from the recent completion of the high-speed fibre inter-connector linking Maroochydore to markets in the US and Asia. Businesses in Maleny and surrounds will miss out because of our poor internet connections. Not only will this be a major deterrent to anyone wanting to setup a business in Maleny or the hinterland, it will have a serious impact on house prices in this region. Increasingly we see potential house buyers demand a good internet connection.

The Federal government recently announced that it would upgrade at no cost to the householder, thousands of under-performing NBN connections to full fibre this year, with up to two million upgrades planned by the end of 2023. It is unlikely that Hinterland internet users on Fixed Wireless and Satellite will get this upgrade. Certainly those on ADSL will not get any benefit from this taxpayer-funded initiative. This is where its most galling for our Region. Not only did we miss out on the NBN upgrade to high-speed internet, we also are destined to miss out on any subsequent future upgrades to higher speed internet connections.

*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?*

The Regions need to see proof that the egalitarianism that Australians have grown to expect is not slowly being chipped away. There is clear evidence that this has happened with the two-tiered NBN rollout. Large towns and cities are getting a first-class NBN and the Regions are getting a second-class, or in many cases, no NBN.

Also, as previously mentioned, most Maleny and hinterland residents would know that for them there are only two options to connect to the NBN: either through a fixed wireless tower or satellite. Many who can't connect to one of the few towers in the region because they have no line of sight to it, choose not to get satellite because of bad weather and the extra charges for streaming services. It is not a matter lack of information, it's a matter of poor services.

*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?*

Public information on connectivity options is adequate in the Regions. People here are well informed and as technically savvy as their City cousins. The real problem is that compared to Australians living in our large towns and cities, people in the Regions have lower levels of health care, educational opportunities, access to facilities such as banks, employment opportunities, emergency services as well as telecommunications. With the migration, hastened by Covid, of population from the cities to the Regions, it becomes more important than ever for the quality of these services to be raised. Telecommunications is the critical service on which all the others depend.

*16. What other matters should the Committee consider in its review and why are they important?*

As far as telecommunications goes, one-size-fits-all is not appropriate for the Regions. Certainly satellite is appropriate for small, far-flung settlements west of the Great Dividing Range where wet and stormy weather and prolific vegetation growth are not big factors. But satellite does not work for towns like ours built on top of the Great Dividing Range. Similarly, Fixed Wireless may be appropriate for larger towns where line of sight to a tower is not an issue. But Fixed Wireless does not work for towns like ours where trees are large and houses are built on ridges and in valleys where good line of sight to a tower is rare. We are forced to accept the two NBN technologies that are not suited for our area. A simpler, more cost-effective solution would be to continue the FTTN infrastructure rollout for those streets in our Region that have problems with Satellite or Fixed Wireless. It's not difficult. Most such streets already have good (government-owned) copper wire which is currently used to carry voice calls and only a few new NBN nodes need to be installed to provide good, reliable FTTN NBN internet connections to the vast majority of residents.

## Summary

The Sunshine Coast Council promotes our Region (one of the fastest growing in Australia) as a desirable location for raising families, retiring, conducting small business and small-scale agriculture. Today, that means that one of the most basic infrastructures required is a fast, reliable and secure internet.

We don't have that.

Our Region has been deemed by NBN Co as being Rural and the two technologies available for Rural areas (Fixed Wireless and Satellite) do not work across our Region. Our topography, being based on the top of the range, precludes good line of sight to a communications tower and renders Fixed Wireless as being not suitable. Our weather, being cloudy and rainy for about half the year, precludes internet by Satellite as inclement weather is a known restraint. Our Region needs a continuation of the FTTN infrastructure (and then subsequent upgrades to FTTP) to cover the whole township and its satellite communities and not just the CBD. We also need more Fixed Wireless towers in locations that overcome our hilly terrain.

The coastal city of Maroochydore is less than 50 kms from most of our residential areas. To great fanfare, the second high-speed fibre connector cable that connects Australia to the rest of the world was successfully put into service there recently. This should have meant unparalleled internet connectivity to the rest of the world and a boon for business on the Sunshine Coast and Hinterland. However, the Hinterland's poor internet means that we cannot take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity.

Our businesses will suffer, our schools, government services and medical centres will suffer and our households will suffer because having a fast and reliable internet is essential in the modern world.

## Appendices

- I. Letter of support from The Maleny Chamber of Commerce
- II. Letter of support from Brush Turkey
- III. Letter of support from Dash Social
- IV. Letter of support from Sunshine Coast Council
- V. Letter from local resident <<name redacted>>

Some personal details have been redacted for privacy reasons but these can be provided if confidentiality is assured.



President – Maleny Commerce  
Kay Ridge

PO Box 482, Maleny, QLD, 4552  
<<redacted>>

17 September 2021

**Letter of Support: NBN Service to Maleny and Surrounds**

**ATTN: Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group**

On behalf of the Maleny Chamber, I am pleased to offer this letter in support of the Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group.

Thank you for your time and efforts to address the lack lustre telecommunications services available to residents and businesses in Maleny and the surrounding rural area. Maleny is a small hub of businesses including a lot of entrepreneurs that work from their residence that require fast internet. Some of our Members have reported that their internet speed has reduced since the introduction of NBN.

Looking to the future, it's hard to imagine that the current speeds available via the NBN (where it is available...) will provide the necessary / promised infrastructure for businesses in our rural areas to grow, adapt and make best use of current (let alone predicted and unpredicted) technologies that will arise and lead the marketplace over the next 20 years.

Considering the proximity of the Sunshine Coast International Broadband Network project and the importance of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland as a Tourism Destination, Agribusiness Hub and Small Business centre, our Chamber strongly supports the requested investment by the Federal Government in an NBN network that will enable our rural businesses and community to continue to thrive.

Yours sincerely,

Kay Ridge  
President  
For and on behalf of Maleny & District Chamber of Commerce and Industries Inc.





## Brush Turkey Enterprises

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Po Box 326, Maleny, QLD, 4552

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email:

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### RE: NBN Service to Maleny and Surrounds

#### ATTN: Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group

Thank you for your time and efforts to address the lack lustre telecommunications services available to residents and businesses in Maleny and the surrounding rural area. As a business that has operated and grown in Maleny over the last 23 years, thanks in a large part to the use of the internet.

Our Head Quarters and Production Nursery and has been based in Reesville 7km west of the Maleny town centre for the last 14 years. Internet connect here is via ADSL and a copper-based network in a poor state of repair, download speeds are 50-66% less today than they were 14 years ago (currently at 5-6mbs).

Our retail nursery is in the commercial town centre and has been operating for 6 years, originally via the ADSL network, but we were early adopters of the NBN network approximately 3 years ago. This saw download speeds increase from approximately 20mbs to around 100mbs, but connectivity between our two offices is still hampered due to a poor network outside of town.

Looking to the future, it's hard to imagine that the current speeds available via the NBN (where it is available...) will provide the necessary / promised infrastructure for businesses in our rural areas to grow, adapt and make best use of current (let alone predicted and unpredicted) technologies that will arise and lead the marketplace over the next 20 years.

Considering the proximity of the Sunshine Coast International Broadband Network project and the importance of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland as a Tourism Destination, Agribusiness Hub and Small Business centre, I strongly support the requested investment by the Federal Government in an NBN network that will enable our rural businesses and community to continue to thrive.

Spencer Shaw  
Brush Turkey Enterprises

16/09/2021

III

# DASH *social*

17 September 2021

Re: NBN Service to Maleny and Surrounds

**ATTN: Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group**

Our organisation was very interested to hear of this working group and you're addressing the dismal telecommunications services available to residents and businesses in Maleny and the surrounding rural area. As a business owner of Maleny for the past 20 years and in the last 5 years owning a social media and marketing business solely dependent on fast internet I thank you for bringing this to our business community.

Our office is on Macadamia Drive, Maleny and I would have expected with the introduction of the NBN that our download speeds would be faster.

Looking to the future, it's hard to imagine that the current speeds available via the NBN (where it is available...) will provide the necessary / promised infrastructure for businesses in our rural areas to grow, adapt and make best use of current (let alone predicted and unpredicted) technologies that will arise and lead the marketplace over the next 25 years.

Considering the proximity of the Sunshine Coast International Broadband Network project and the importance of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland as a Tourism Destination, Agribusiness Hub and Small Business center, I strongly support the requested investment by the Federal Government in an NBN network that will enable our rural businesses and community to continue to thrive.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on <<redacted>> to discuss further.

Kind regards



Kay Ridge  
Founder and Creative Director

<<redacted>>

43 Macadamia Drive, Maleny Qld 4552

ello@dashsocial.com.au

## IV

**Words of support from Mr Bill Hadrill, Chief Strategy Officer, Sunshine Coast Council:**

"The Sunshine Coast Council is one of the fastest growing regional areas in Australia, with the population forecast to grow from 340,000 to over 500,000 people by 2041. It is essential that the region's telecommunication infrastructure continues to mature to effectively service current and forecast future growth and its associated demands. Council commends the Maleny and Districts NBN Working Group for preparing a submission to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review to help draw attention to existing network deficiencies, and the opportunities that exist to further enhance telecommunications coverage within the region."

**From:** <<name redacted>>

**Address:** Maleny Vista, Maleny 4552

I live in a part of Maleny that is five minutes from town. If you draw co-ordinates between my house, the NBN hub at Mary Cairncross Park on Mountain View Road and the Fixed Wireless Tower on Burgess Avenue Maleny, I am very close to where the co-ordinates intersect. Our telco provider is Telstra. In 2020 when the technician came to install the NBN, he said that as we did not have a line of sight to the tower in Burgess Avenue, it was impossible. We were very disappointed.

I contacted the office of the local MP for Fisher, the Hon Andrew Wallace, for assistance. A staff member in Mr Wallace's office said Mr Wallace had a contact in Telstra in Canberra who could help. I spoke to this officer and he told me to connect to one of the satellite plans offered by various providers, but not by Telstra. This officer did not inform me that these telcos ration streaming services and charge extra for them. Being a pensioner, I'm reluctant to pay extra for streaming services. Inclement weather is a frequent occurrence in Maleny. I am informed by friends and associates, that such weather causes outages to satellite connections. I have had two other communications with Mr Wallace's office but the only reply I get is to connect to satellite.

All Australians have paid for the NBN and we are entitled to an equal service. People in the regions should not have to pay extra for services that people in cities have included in their plan. NBN executives paid themselves \$77M in bonuses in 2020-21, apparently on the grounds that the NBN rollout is complete. For people in the regions, the rollout is far from complete. I currently connect to the internet through ADSL 1. My download speed is 7mbs and my upload speed is 0.25 mbs. I do a couple of courses and it's very slow and embarrassing uploading a one page Word document of homework to my tutor while she waits online. In my household, no two people can watch streaming services at the same time.