

## **2021 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make a submission during the Central Coast and Northern Rivers of NSW Microsoft Teams meeting on August 25.

As President of Ulmarra Village Inc, our local progress association, I would like to make a submission on behalf of my local community. I would like to let you know of issues, limitations, views, and experiences using telecommunications services in our part of rural and regional Australia.

### **Reliability of local mobile and broadband services**

Due to the lack of fibre NBN in the village, the Fixed Wireless becomes overwhelmed in peak times with quality greatly affected.

Optus couldn't guarantee bandwidth in my area and have stopped providing NBN Fixed Wireless service to new customers. Telstra also don't supply web-based signup to Fixed Wireless NBN in my area with new customers directed to call a 1800 number or visit a Telstra store to discuss new connections.

During recent floods in March/April 2021 we lost mobile phone connectivity. This affects the community's ability to stay up to date with current information, warnings and especially Evacuation Orders etc.

### **The role and importance of telecommunications during COVID-19 and natural disasters**

During recent floods in March/April 2021 we lost mobile phone connectivity. This affects the community's ability to stay up to date with current information, warnings and especially Evacuation Orders etc.

During times of COVID lockdown, bandwidth and data speeds become even more important as the internet becomes the main connection to the rest of the world. Fixed Wireless NBN has extremely slow upload speeds which makes Working from Home (like during lockdown) difficult with file uploads, video conferencing and entertainment all trying to use the same limited resources. The reliability and quality, especially with multiple users on a single connection, like school kids, parents all trying to use the same bandwidth makes communicating, working, and learning even more difficult in rural and regional Australia than in main capital cities.

### **How telecommunications can support regional development**

During this COVID pandemic, workers have pivoted to Working From Home (WFH). To reliably WFH a stable, fast, reliable internet connection is required. There has been a migration of workers from city areas to regional and rural areas. One of the main factors in a worker choosing an area to relocate too is the type and quality of the telecommunication services available in an area. I have been told by potential home buyers to my area that they will not relocate to my area as there is only Fixed Wireless internet connection available with no options to upgrade and no alternate technologies like 5G available. By restricting internet connection types, city decentralisation to my area is not possible. Ulmarra and the Clarence Valley generally would welcome WFH workers, they bring new

skills and opportunities to an area, but without the infrastructure in place to support them, they are unable to make this change.

### **The potential of emerging communications technologies**

My community is stuck on Fixed Wireless with no option to upgrade to fibre even though we watched fibre being laid down the main street of the village past homes and businesses to a disused Police Station. Even though we requested to be included in any Fixed Wireless to Fibre technology changes, we were never invited to be part of this fibre roll-out.

### **Ways to help regional consumers get connected, stay connected and use their connection**

While I have been writing this submission, an aged resident of Ulmarra has approached me to help her after Telstra disconnected her home phone. She is turning 90 next month, lives alone and does not drive. There was a problem with her Direct Debit and Telstra were unable to fix it over the phone, she was told to go to a Telstra Store to sort it out. Her landline is her lifeline to the outside world and extremely important for emergency situations. There was no empathy or alternate means made available to her given her age, fragility, or the fact that we are in a global pandemic. This was distressing to an observer, and I would like to see alternate methods made available to our elderly and community members who may need a bit of extra support.

I thank you for this opportunity.

Kind regards

Steve Pickering  
Ulmarra Village Inc  
President