

28 September 2021

2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Committee Members,

Murray River Council appreciates this opportunity to provide input to the review. Our submission is completely non-technical and simply describes our communities lived experience and needs in the area of telecommunications.

Council acknowledges the major challenge to achieve outcomes in accordance with the Universal Services Guarantee and the even greater challenge to provide rural areas with access to services with minimum peak speeds similar to urban areas.

In this submission, when talking about service provision, we are talking mainly about Telstra as the other providers have little presence within the Murray River Council area.

Digital connectivity within our council area is vitally important:

1. For community health, safety, and security in urban and rural settings.
2. For agricultural production, manufacturing, transport, retail, and utilization of digital technological advances such as the internet of Things (IOT) to ensure our businesses remain competitive and can increase productivity.
3. For education and promotion of innovation.
4. For social interaction and connectedness.

The lived reality is:

1. The strength of the mobile service in areas outside of communities and along major highways such as the Cobb Highway, Murray Valley Highway, Northern Highway, the Sturt Highway, and on our regional roads is weak with numerous black spots. The situation poses increased health, safety and security risks for our communities.

“Telstra claim that the receivers in popular portable communication devices are not strong enough to receive the current services and recommend booster products such as CelFi Go which certainly can improve reception but at an additional cost of \$1000.”

2. That the general community, students and business in our smaller rural towns and communities (Murray Downs, Koraleigh, Tooleybuc, Moulamein, and Wakool) have extremely poor internet access and connectivity. The standard of service received in these communities, would not be tolerated by metropolitan or larger urban centers. Therefore urgent action is required to address this inequity in accordance with the USG.
3. That without improved digital connectivity in the regions, business will find it difficult to remain competitive, investment in regional development will slow and populations will decline, placing even greater pressure on metropolitan centers and on urban infrastructure.

Local government is not in a position to contribute funds towards telecommunication system and delivery programs. Murray River Council believes that the Australian government should increase funding through new and existing programs and in collaboration with NBN Co and the telcos identify and improve services where they are substandard.

Governments should also consider investing in research and development into lower-cost new and emerging technology that can deliver faster internet speeds and better connectivity to rural and remote regions.

Council's submission, although brief, reflects the simplicity and yet complexity of the needs of rural and remote communities. We look forward to your recommendations and to government embracing and implementing them.

Should you require further details please contact the writer at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



John Harvie
Director Community and Economic Development