

## To the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021:

I am writing on behalf of [REDACTED] which has been owners and seasonal residents at Ansons Bay, Tasmania for around 75 years. In this time, we have seen a great deal of change in the telecommunications infrastructure, from initial snowy and unreliable television broadcasts to unreliable mobile coverage to satellite broadband. My family's perspective on the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review is to draw attention to the difficulties that arise in seasonal areas that are not well-serviced by telecommunications companies.

In this submission, I am addressing only some of the posed questions because I do not have suggestions for all of the problems. The answers to the posed questions are below:

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

Ansons Bay is a small seasonal community on the north east coast of Tasmania. For much of the year, only a few permanent residents live in the area. During off-season, mobile phone coverage is poor, but for those people who can get some coverage, bandwidth is sufficient to use the technology in the ways expected in modern Australia.

However, during on-season, and fire season, coverage remains poor, but bandwidth limitations result in almost no coverage for anyone. This means that when the bay is at greatest risk of natural disaster, and potentially, the most people in harm's way, the mobile phone system becomes deeply unreliable.

People drown at Ansons Bay, they have car and motorbike accidents, they have medical episodes, and the mobile phone network is dangerously unreliable. The closest ambulance is 45 minutes' drive away, so requesting help as soon as possible is essential.

Unreliable mobile service also makes it difficult to engage in modern types of business, like AirBnB: the guests' expectations and safety requirements just can't be met by the unreliable phone network. Video streaming services have come to be expected in holiday locations and the currently available bandwidth means that these services may work quite well in the off-season when no one is there, but become problematic in the on-season.

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

Moving as many people to the NBN as possible could go some way to improving the reliability of the mobile service, however Sky Muster does not provide plans that are appropriate for seasonal communities, where large amounts of data are used over short periods of time.

Creating some short-term high data plans on Sky Muster might be a solution.

The Internet Service Provider, Launtel, allows connection to the Internet for as little as one day. Their prices are relatively high for monthly service, but extremely attractive for short-stay accommodation and season areas. Launtel can only provide this service where NBN fibre to the premises exists.

Fibre to the premises might be a viable solution in some remote areas, including Ansons Bay, because while the distances are long, there are not a lot of intervening buildings.

With reliable internet services, access to emergency services, and the emergency services' websites becomes viable, but also the pressure is relieved from the mobile phone network, opening bandwidth for emergency purposes.

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

The importance and need for telecommunications infrastructure is going to grow, COVID-19 has shown that people can work from anywhere, efficiently and effectively. Reducing commutes, returning free time to people will result in improved health outcomes for everyone, and spread economic advantage to traditionally neglected areas. Now is a real opportunity for change, but it needs infrastructure to do so.

I think that this changes the cost calculation. While Telstra has confirmed that it is not viable to provide adequate mobile coverage at Ansons Bay, the benefits that derive from eHealth initiatives and employment in regional areas both decrease costs and increase revenue for the government, making it appropriate for the various levels of government in Australia appropriate partners for the large profit-focused telecommunications providers.

#### 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?

Tasmania, in particular, benefits from tourism. Its low population is both what attracts people to Tasmania and makes providing infrastructure more expensive. But improved access to telecommunications infrastructure in remote areas will lead to new business models. Who knows what they will be, but without the infrastructure first, new models will not develop.

#### 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?

Obviously, 5G technologies are coming. The likelihood is that everyone's next phone will be 5G capable. But at seasonal regional places like Ansons Bay, significant infrastructure improvements will be required to satisfy the times of the year when people are there, otherwise there will just be a bigger bandwidth pipe to a very small faucet.

#### 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?

PrivateHealth.gov.au helps people to choose the private health services that are best aligned with their needs. Telecommunications would benefit from a similar service to help people choose the best ISP for them.

But in seasonal regional areas, the current models do not work because Sky Muster is really only suitable for long-term contracts. For regional consumers to be better-supported, Sky Muster will also require some short-term thinking.

#### Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Regional Telecommunications Review for 2021. I hope that this feedback leads to better outcomes for seasonal regional communities.

Yours

