

Officer: Bill Haddrill

Direct telephone: [REDACTED]

Direct email: [REDACTED]

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

To whom it may concern,

Re: Sunshine Coast Council Submission – 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2021 Regional Telecommunication Review. As one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, the Sunshine Coast Council (Council) considers enhanced physical and digital connectivity as a current and emerging priority for the region, and for connecting regional, rural and remote areas more broadly across Queensland. The importance of connectivity has become more crucial due to recent events including the social and economic impacts resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as an increasing number of natural disasters impacting the region.

By 2041, it is estimated our region will grow from 340,000 to over 500,000 people, this presents both opportunities and challenges in relation to planning and delivering on telecommunications infrastructure and services. It is essential that the region's telecommunication infrastructure continues to mature to accommodate and effectively service forecast future growth and its associated demands.

During natural disasters, information availability and connectivity is critical in ensuring key messages are communicated to the community in a timely manner. Poor quality, and in some instances an absence of network coverage can potentially be life threatening, where the community needs connectivity for up to date disaster news and information, and advice on flooded roads and rising water levels or to simply call for help.

It is acknowledged that the Council area is relatively well serviced by the major telcos, including the recent rollout of 5G infrastructure in the coastal urban corridor. There are however areas of hinterland and rural areas in the Council area that continue to be serviced by the 3G network, and in excess of 2,700 structures in the Council's hinterland and rural areas that have been identified as falling outside the network coverage area (i.e. having no

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telecommunications coverage) of the major telecommunications providers. With the planned closure of the Telstra 3G network from mid-2024, there is the potential for the number of un-serviced properties to increase.

In 2021, and in the face of increasing risk from the threat of wildfire and other natural disasters, it is unsatisfactory that our rural communities located within 100km of the Brisbane CBD continue to experience poor, and in some instances no network service. Disaster alerts and response activities are increasingly being communicated digitally, including through SMS and social media mediums, and access to detailed disaster information through Council's Disaster Hub <https://disasterhub.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/#Dashboard> are all dependent on high quality telecommunications networks.

In recent times, COVID-19 has accelerated flexible work arrangements and led to a significant increase in work from home arrangements for Council's workforce. Remote working opportunities has also led to a significant increase in people relocating to the Sunshine Coast for its outstanding lifestyle and liveability with expectations of being able to access telecommunications infrastructure commensurate with their respective business requirements.

With video calls and streaming having become the norm. High bandwidth and greater reliability is now required at home to ensure employees can keep working when choosing not to, or being prevented from, working at the office.

Council has responded by significantly enhancing telecommunications capability within our control. Internal infrastructure has been scaled up to accommodate the demands of employees working from home; including increasing the egress points with additional bandwidth allowing for out band remote management; broadcasting of events and seminars run or supported by council increased, in lieu of physical gatherings, putting more demand on communications infrastructure.

Council is seeking commensurate support and investment from other levels of government and the telecommunications industry to further lift network capability to ensure the social, education and business demands of an increasingly distributed workforce are met.

Younger generations are also increasingly reliant on internet connectivity for health and education services, and general social connectivity. Limited or low speed internet services will continue to handicap the development of future generations and contribute to the loss of youth from regional and rural areas.

Businesses and farms are also increasingly using high-speed internet services where they exist, leveraging technologies such as video calling and high-speed transfers to support production, farm management, and connectivity to markets. On farms where fibre is not economically viable, directional high gain 4G antennas, professionally installed, should be offered as a cost-effective service. Ideally, fibre should be run to more locations to ensure quality networks. Council acknowledges that better NBN infrastructure on the Sunshine Coast is required in bringing the region in line with the rest of the world with 1GB connections with fibre to the premise as the default/ standard.

The scope of what was designed to be delivered as the NBN rollout project has been significantly reduced, with Australian communities now feeling the impacts of this decision. NBNv2 should be considered to improve telecommunications and aim to bring fibre to the premise.

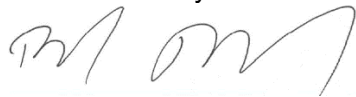
Investing in fibre to remote communities should be considered as a long-term solution. Incentives for ISP's to install to remote locations, a method of achieving this could be funding the installation costs or having requirements for mining companies to share fibre capacity in remote locations.

New technologies also are continually emerging and have the potential to provide cheaper and faster methods of delivering fibre optic cable to areas. Enabling government funding or grants to make it viable for cable installers to run a lot more fibre in the ground. Fibre will form the future networks to enable future growth in remote areas.

In 2032 the Olympic Games will demand a significant uplift in telecommunications capacity in South East Queensland. It is vital that the planning and investment required to support the games and legacy opportunities are delivered over the next 5-10 years to ensure world grade solutions are in place to meet the demand. Funding from state and federal levels will be critical to deliver these outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity for Council to provide a submission and I look forward to hearing the outcome of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review.

Yours sincerely



Bill Hadrill
Chief Strategy Officer