



28 September 2021

Hon Luke Hartsuyker (Chair)
2021 Regional Telecommunications Review
Dept. Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Communications
GPO Box 594
Canberra, ACT 2601
c/o secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

RE: 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Thank you for the opportunity provided to Litchfield Council (Council) to respond to the Regional Telecommunications Review (Review).

Council's position on this is guided by its *Strategic Plan 2018-2022*. Specifically, the section 'Everything You Need – Community Economic Prosperity' states Council's commitment to "advocate for new and upgraded mobile base stations to ensure all Litchfield residents and businesses have access to efficient telecommunications."

For its part, Council addresses Development Applications from telecommunications carriers in a timely manner. Council also works with the carriers to achieve new and upgraded communications infrastructure and assets through a variety of actions, including the leasing of Council owned land directly to carriers for such uses.

More can be done however, and Council would welcome the Federal and Territory Governments achieving more for our rural and remote communities as an outcome of the Review. Many in the Litchfield community are grossly underserved for phone and internet coverage, the provision of which should be regarded as essential services in 2021.

During recent COVID19 emergencies, when restrictions were imposed, Council received enquiries from concerned community members who felt isolated and cut off from assistance due to poor – or no – phone coverage.

These issues relating to service reliability and non-services black spots in areas of the Litchfield region are not only a very real issue for the community during emergencies the locality is vulnerable to, such as cyclonic storms, bushfires and COVID19. A lack of services is also seriously impacting on home-based businesses, as well as hospitality and tourism ventures – of which there are many in the Litchfield municipality.



Council has communicated directly with carriers about this, however the response has been that carriers need to balance the obligation to provide services with the commercial realities of operating profitably in the region. Carriers cannot provide a commitment or timelines as to when and how the community will be adequately serviced.

Council notes that there have been broad measures that may have some impact within the region, such as the Mobile Black Spot Program. However, as an outcome of the Review, Council would like to better understand any specific initiatives that may be undertaken in the local area, along with any expected schedule for rolling them out.

Such information would allow Council and the local community to measure the effectiveness of Government policies and programs specifically relating to the Litchfield municipality, and lead to a clearer identification of changes that may be made to enhance digital connectivity.

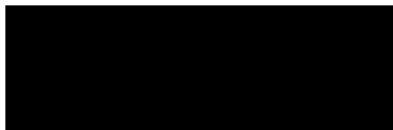
Council would like to be engaged with directly in the planned continuation of the Mobile Black Spots Program to assist in the identification of sites for telecommunications facilities, which could therefore directly address areas of outstanding need.

It is expected that the Review will find that more needs to be done where there is currently a shortfall in coverage due to a lack of profitability for telecommunications carriers. Council wishes to understand the direct steps that Government might make to intervene on behalf of the community to ensure they benefit from improved technological innovations in the provision of phone and internet coverage.

In such instances, Council calls on Government to explore ways to potentially cross-subsidise the costs of delivering services to the Litchfield community to ensure they have access equal to those who live in cities, who currently receive better coverage at lower costs.

If you require any further discussion in relation to this application, please contact me on 08 8983 0600.

Yours faithfully,



Chief Executive Officer