

SHIRE OF WYNDHAM  
EAST KIMBERLEY



Our Ref: ED.05.3  
Enquires: [REDACTED]

29<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Hon Luke Hartsuyker  
Chair  
Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee  
c/- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via email: [secretariat@rtirc.gov.au](mailto:secretariat@rtirc.gov.au)

Dear Mr Hartsuyker

**Submission on Regional Telecommunications Review 2021**

This letter forms the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley's (the Shire's) submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

Submission by: Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley  
Contact: Alfred Nagaiya  
Contact Details: Mobile: [REDACTED]; email: [REDACTED]

Our Shire is large in area (around 121,000 square kilometres), with a small population (around 7,500, around 33% Indigenous). The major towns in the Shire include Kununurra (major service centre for the Ord River Irrigation Area; major air and road transport hub – East Kimberley Regional Airport) and the town on Wyndham (major sea transport hub – Wyndham Port). There are also a number of Aboriginal communities, the largest of which is Kalumburu in the far north western part of the Shire. Due to its small population, the shire has a small rates base. This is a major inhibiting factor for the Shire to self-fund significant infrastructure projects, including telecommunications.

As the Committee would have noted from the consultations held in this region, there was considerable negative comment from participants on the lack of voice and data reliability and coverage in the region. This is most frustrating as we have NBN in town (Kununurra), but limited connectivity. We are in the process of undergoing considerable development in areas such as resources, agriculture, aquaculture and tourism. We have over \$3 billion in value of projects that could materialise in the next 3 to 10 years. These include:

- Resources  
A number of projects in the pipeline for either restart or commencement that will require good telecommunications systems to support their commercial operations.
- Agriculture  
The region is home to the Ord River Irrigation Area. Cotton is expected to become a significant crop grown in the region, with the expected construction of a cotton gin in Kununurra within the next 2-3 years.

The development of Ord Stage 3 (around 65,000 hectares) is also expected to become a reality within the next few years. To support this development, the duplication of the irrigation channel and supporting irrigation infrastructure will be required, at a cost of between \$400M - \$500M.

- Aquaculture  
Seafarms' Project Sea Dragon – grow-out ponds are already under construction. The construction of the processing plant in Kununurra is expected to commence in the 2022 dry season. At full production, this project is expected to realise around 500 tonnes of prawns daily.
- Tourism  
There is considerable interest from tourism operators to develop the East Kimberley as a tourism destination. The infrastructure upgrades, particularly airside infrastructure at the East Kimberley Regional Airport (EKRA), will allow direct flights from Kununurra to any destination in Australia. This will be the catalyst to provide cheaper flight options for tourists and residents, save considerable travel time and improve liveability in the region.

The above are just some of the projects on the horizon for our region. These developments mean we will need additional workers to support these projects. This then necessitates significant improvements in liveability to attract and retain skills people in the region. The key to attraction and retention of people is a good telecommunications system – sadly lacking at present.

As stated earlier, we have limited NBN in Kununurra, but not in Wyndham. It seems that not enough thought was put into the extent of the initial fibre roll-out to meet the community's and/or the business' needs. For example, the NBN fibre runs within 100 metres of the EKRA terminal, however, no provision was made to connect the fibre to the airport. As a result, businesses at the airport are working with ADSL and experiencing constant drop-out of the slow internet services.

Mobile services are also severely constrained. Some operators have resorted to paying for two carriers (Optus and Telstra) for mobile services. Surely in 2021, this is an unacceptable outcome.

Following the RTIRC's consultation with the region a few months ago, we have been contacted by NBN. A meeting is scheduled later today and we are hopeful that we will get at least have positive outcome on a timeline for a fibre roll-out to the EKRA. However, we understand that we will be required to contribute funds to have this infrastructure in place. This is again an example of remote regions like ours having to now pay for the poor decision-making of NBN Co when the fibre was initially rolled out. It is suffice to say that NBN Co will be able to generate future revenue, particularly when a business park (based on freight and logistics) is expanded at the EKRA. However, NBN still will need to address quickly the roll-out of fibre to the residential areas and the broader business community in Kununurra.

In relation to Wyndham, NBN has advised that it is willing to work with the Shire to undertake studies associated with making an application to the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) for funding to provide fibre connection to Wyndham. However, any fibre connectivity to Wyndham could be years away.

In relation to the RCP, we are of the view that there is limited, if any, awareness from assessors of applications regarding the needs of remote regions like ours. It would be safe to assume that not many, if any, of the assessors have actually visited remote regions like ours. Further, there seem to be little credence given to the alignment to the policies of the Government – e.g. Developing Northern Australia and Agriculture 2030. Surely, to give effect to such major policy initiatives, programs such as the RCP and GBEs such as NBN Co, should take into consideration the needs of remote regions to have access to infrastructure to facilitate such major Government initiatives. Further, when we are unsuccessful in securing grants, we are constantly advised that the program was “over-subscribed”. We believe this “over subscription” should be “telling” the Government that there is enormous unmet demand that needs to be addressed.

Should there be any clarifications required on the contents of this document, your officers could contact Alfred Nagaiya, the Shire’s Senior Economic Development Officer, on email [REDACTED] or via mobile [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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**VERNON LAWRENCE**  
Chief Executive Officer