

Thursday, 30 September 2021

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

RE: 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021. The residents of the Narromine Shire Council area face many of the issues that are outlined within the paper and over many years of seeking improvement still find themselves with inferior or non-existent voice and data communication options and with less quality and speed than larger centres and cities enjoy.

The reasons for seeking improvement and comparable services with regional centres are well documented and researched. These include.

- Mobile services for voice communication are essential
- Connectivity being essential to encouraging people to work and live in regional areas
- Connectivity being essential in times of emergency and to ensure better outcomes
- Connectivity being an essential tool for small and big business
- Connectivity being required for education
- Connectivity contributing to improved farm productivity and growth
- Connectivity contributing to better health outcomes

These issues of poor connectivity particularly to the mobile network have been exasperated recently with Statewide lockdowns during COVID and the need to isolate. This has increased the demand on the network and highlighted the poor performance.

During the recent trial HSC exams Narromine Shire Council was contacted by local rural residents to see if it were possible to open up one of our Council buildings with access to the internet so that local students could undertake exams online and study. Access to the school curriculum and exams was best accessed online and many rural connections were too slow and not reliable enough to work on. Narromine Shire Council provided one of its buildings to do this and over a three-week period more than a dozen students utilised the facility and made the trip into town for this access.

We have also been contacted recently by local farmers who are seeking to introduce improved technology on farm. This demands the ability for farm equipment to communicate between equipment and also for end of day analysis by experts off farm. This has proven to be not possible with mobile coverage too variable and communication speeds that don't match those seeking to analyse the data and so the communication breaks down. In these cases the growers are limited to older technology or with new equipment not reaching its potential.

The need for improved data connectivity is now also seen in the irrigation industry with water authorities requiring real time monitoring where connectivity will not allow this to occur. There is a fear among irrigators that without a solution water licencing is at risk.

These examples of poor connectivity for education and for farm needs are costing our region and all rural regions many billions of dollars in lost income through direct productivity improvements. This poor connectivity is costing our region the ability to attract residents and is a contributing reason as to why the population from rural areas is drifting to larger centres.

When seeking out internet connectivity rural residents are directed to satellite options. These options however are more expensive, less reliable and do not have the ability of connecting to multiple devices.

In 2021, with the technology that is available and with the knowledge of what best practice can bring to farm income, education, health, safety and liveability it is time to put the funds required into the tower infrastructure that is needed to bring wide scale mobile connectivity and with this improve our voice and data connectivity.

We would welcome the opportunity to show some of these examples firsthand if the committee would like to visit our region and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss further.

We wish you all the best for the review.

Yours sincerely,



Phil Johnston
Director Community and Economic Development