

30 September 2021

2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat  
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To the Secretariat

## 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Ltd (CPAQ) appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review and to highlight some of the challenges faced by caravan parks operating their businesses in regional and remote areas of Queensland.

Reliable telecommunications are critical to the smooth running of a business in the modern world, and for our members, it is critical that their guests can reliably get in touch with them.

In addition to allowing to be contacted by current and potential guests, reliable and affordable telecommunications can increase productivity, allow access to upskilling opportunities that distance may otherwise prevent, increase awareness of a region, allow businesses to implement new technology and often, encourage innovation. For tourism businesses, like our members, telecommunications can cause both positive and negative guest feedback, potential impacting both the reputation of the business and the region.

Reliable telecommunications are also critical for the health and well being of Queenslanders right across the state, whether it be access to telehealth services, or the ability to get online with their industry peers or to attend webinars to support their mental health.

For these reasons our members have a significant interest in the review and have actively provided our association with their thoughts and comments which we have outlined in this document for consideration as part of the review.

### Mobile and Internet Coverage

In our submission to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review, we noted that 55% of our members reported that their mobile and internet coverage had stayed the same for the past three years, however concerningly approximately 22% of our members reported that their mobile and internet coverage in their region had gotten worse in the past three years.

When asked this same question in 2021, 65% of members that responded to our survey reported that their internet and mobile coverage had remained the same as three years ago. 25% reported that in their region, the mobile and internet coverage had gotten worse. Of most concern is that when looking at respondents from remote locations, 60% advised that mobile and internet coverage in their region had gotten worse, with no remote businesses reporting that it had improved.



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### Member comments:

*“Though the local system appears to be becoming overloaded, we keep changing to more advanced equipment so as to keep the same level of reception.”*

*“We’ve had satellite before - it is expensive, limited service and does not work during extreme weather conditions where you may need to contact 000.”*

*“Hard to overcome, because when they turn the wireless NBN off without warning, we lose both internet AND business phones! If we can get warning (almost never happens!), we can divert to our mobile phone and enter the reservation system via a “hotspot” phone connection.”*

While in some businesses, mobile and internet coverage has resulted in negative guest reviews some parks are using their lack of mobile or internet service as a competitive advantage and using the fact guests are forced to disconnect as marketing opportunity.

This lack of service however does raise issues of concern around emergency management and the ability of the business to implement efficiencies through technology.

## Mobile Reception

Due to their locations and the fact that caravan park guests drive to their destination, mobile phone coverage is critical, not just to allow for the effective running of a business, but also for the safety of their staff and guests who may be on the road or working/staying in far areas of the park.

While caravan parks in metropolitan areas (Brisbane/Sunshine Coast/Gold Coast) and major regional centres reported that mobile phones mostly have reception in their areas, 40% of respondents to our survey in remote areas of Queensland and 15% of respondents in regional Queensland never have mobile phone reception.

For those caravan parks in remote locations, only 20% of respondents reported that they mostly had mobile reception, compared to 77% of respondents in regional Queensland who mostly or always had mobile reception.

While businesses in metropolitan areas and major regional centres have multiple carriers available to them, the vast majority of caravan parks in regional and remote Queensland are limited to one carrier in their region. This can result in higher costs and means that if there is an outage the business is unable to find a short-term alternative solution to see them through.

Further this puts the safety of their guests, who may be travelling thousands of kilometres, at risk.

### Member comments:

*“Guests often complain they can’t get mobile phone signal and we do not have WiFi access.”*

*“All the customers complain that they can’t get phone service and most of them complain about the internet and not be able to get it. I don’t get TV service out here and that is also a major problem as well”*

*“The mobile and internet coverage hasn’t changed, to the best of our knowledge, in the past 3 years.”*

## Internet Service

The past three years has seen a significant shift in the internet services used by our members with a significant take up of the NBN. Use of ADSL remains high in remote Queensland and some caravan parks are still relying on a 4G connection through their mobile device.

Outside of remote Queensland, caravan parks report their internet works well most of the time however many caravan parks have initially been signed up to an unsuitable NBN package initially causing significant frustration through the transition.

Of significant concern, 80% of our members have had ongoing issues affecting their internet service.

### Member comments:

*“Unfortunately, the ongoing issues are out of our control. Our satellite connection can easily be interrupted by weather conditions - if it rains (north QLD this happens regularly during the wet season), very windy or Sydney has a storm; we have no internet. We rely heavily on being prepared with paper versions of everything.”*

*“We are told NBN is not scheduled for our office, although some residents have it installed. The Telstra mobile 4G device usually is good but then unreliable on some days. Our Optus connected EFTPOS also has signal issues some days. Park customers often ask for our WiFi password, however, we only have enough connection (unreliable as it is) for our office.”*

*“Parts of our property have such poor reception that even with a booster it’s almost unusable. We are losing connection almost daily while trying to enter bookings and do eftpos transactions”*

*“The issues still exist, we have created a hotspot area and asked everyone to use this area if they cannot get their internet.”*

*“During peak tourist season and school holidays the internet speed slows to snail pace some days. Gets very frustrating when trying to book people in and you have to wait up to 30 seconds for the little circle to stop spinning on the screen before you can continue.”*

*“We run an online booking system, the internet cannot keep up”*

## Barriers to increased use of technology

When surveyed, our members indicated that the biggest barrier for their business in increasing their use of digital technology is the speed of services (36%), following that was coverage and reception (31%). Cost was of concern to some members (21%) and knowledge and information on the technologies available, including to access for staff training on these products and services was also considered a barrier for some businesses (8%).

## Telecommunications impacting public safety

Reliable telecommunications are necessary for travellers across Queensland. The ability to call for help in the event of an accident or breakdown, or to make accommodation bookings while on the road.

With the current COVID environment many travellers are not booking days in advance, rather waiting until the day they require accommodation and then making a booking online or by phone for that evening. In some cases these travellers are waiting to see how far they travel in a day and if they find an interesting town along the way.

Caravan parks in regional and remote areas have advised us that their guests have commented on the lack of reception and the challenges this has caused them.

### Member comments:

*“People phoning in to book a site when they are on the road have all sorts of issues due to the lack of coverage”*

## Telecommunications & COVID

As an industry association representing a sector that was effectively shut down as a result of COVID, being able to connect with our members in a supportive and personal manner we incredibly important, not just to ensure they had accurate and timely information, but also to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of each of these business owners.

To achieve this, we implemented video meetings/support groups which were held three times a week in addition to providing daily updates by email. While this provided a high level of support for most members, we had several members who indicated they would have liked to have participated in the video meetings in order to share experience with other operators however they found their service did not allow for a quality connection. This meant that while they could get online, the other participants couldn't always hear them as the line was crackly and robotic.

The businesses that had difficulty getting online were primarily located in regional and remote locations which meant they were already limited in access to support services when compared to their metropolitan counterparts, putting additional strain on their mental health.

The ever-changing environment has also resulted in a significant increase in the number of telephone calls that these businesses are taking on a daily basis. With the Government directive causing caravan parks to have to cancel all their tourist bookings immediately, the combination of incoming and outgoing calls put additional pressure on the phone systems, which for many caravan parks are quite basic.

Several larger caravan parks have since improved their telephone services and upgraded their equipment to allow for reporting on the number of phone calls they receive, the peak period they receive these calls and the average length of time their staff spend on each call, allowing them to better manage their staffing levels.

## Ability to comply with public health directives

In Queensland, all caravan parks are required to ensure that all staff, guests and contractors sign into their business using the Check in Queensland App. This app is only available when there is an internet connection. There are multiple parks in Queensland which do not have 3G or 4G reception at their park and are unable to provide guest wifi as it interferes with their ability to run their business efficiently.

While there is a provision for businesses and individuals unable to use the Check in Queensland app in the Public Health Direction, it is not efficient for the park, or if needed the Queensland Health officials trying to contact trace.

## Emergency management

Technology has made emergency management in a caravan park more efficient with park managers able to distribute information effectively and efficiently through text messages and emails.

Unfortunately, those parks in 'at risk' locations, are also often the parks that have the most unreliable internet and mobile phone reception.

### Member comments:

*"We are now using text messages from our booking software to communicate with guests in our parks when there is something important they need to know, such as information about a bushfire or cyclone and the current advice from both the park and emergency services. In some of our parks this does not work as there is no service and instead we have to rely on old fashion methods of communicating advice, noticeboards, information at check ins, or having staff walk around the park to pass on messages."*

## Investment in infrastructure

We have received reports from members in regional locations of mobile reception deteriorating over time. While they report that there is a 3G tower only a few kilometres away (as the crow flies), it no longer provides the same quality of service they previously experienced.

This park has investigated options to improve coverage at their park as they are located in a bush location and can have thousands of guests on site during peak periods. The park has been quoted between \$10,000 and \$50,000 to fix the issues themselves.

While this solution would provide a solution for the caravan park, it is not cost effective and does not assist the other businesses and residents in the region.

### Member comments:

*“Had to engage the services of an IT expert based out of the area and purchase new equipment to ensure we get the best possible service for our guests”*

*“We have limited service at our property and have called for an additional tower in the region to support both our park and the local residents of the region. While we strongly believe this is the responsibility of the Government or the major telcos, they are pushing responsibility back to us, we simply don’t have the available capital to invest in this infrastructure.”*

## Supporting take up of new services

Many caravan parks have initially been signed up to an unsuitable NBN package initially causing significant frustration through the transition. This is often as a result of inaccurate information provided, or a lack of understanding of the different packages available.

Clear, easily accessible information on new telecommunications solutions, including the details that businesses need to determine the most suitable package for their business, must be made available. Ideally this would be through a tool that allows them to enter key information about their business and the provides recommendations about solutions.

As many small business owners work long hours in their business, it is important this tool is available online so it can be used outside of hours.

When asked what information should be available for areas with poor coverage several caravan parks advised that they would like to know the best service provider for their region in terms of reception and performance. They also noted that they feel that the sales people for the telecommunications companies have a vested interest in telling them what they want to know rather than what they need to know and that it would be beneficial to be able to access independent advice.

### Member comments:

*“Independent technicians working for the benefit of business owners to provide cost-effective and reliable service instead of business owners having to rely on telephone/internet providers who are just wanting to take money for unreliable service/equipment.”*

## Skills required to allow people to get the most from digital technologies

Surprisingly we received very little feedback from members in relation to the skills required to get the most from digital technologies. This may have to do with the fact that often business owners do not realise what skills they

need until they get them and see the value of them.

It was noted that for businesses in regional and remote areas, skills development is significantly more challenging than for those in the city. They generally lack the opportunity to attend face to face training and often rely on online training activities which can be a challenge when they do not have reliable internet connections, or when the use of an online training session impacts the internet connection to the point where other parts of the business are not able to run efficiently unless bandwidth opens up again.

### Member comments:

*“That is a typical city question with access to digital services and internet service is not a problem. It's not the skills it's the lack of reliable service why skill up when the technologies is not available to your area”*

On the following pages we have included a summary of the responses received through our 2021 Telecommunications Review Survey and where available also included the responses to the same questions from the 2018 survey.

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this submission, or the challenges faced by caravan parks in Queensland as a result of telecommunications issues please do not hesitate to contact me on the details on the letterhead on the first page of this submission.

Kind regards



Michelle Weston

Chief Executive Officer

## About Caravan Parks Association of Queensland

Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Ltd (CPAQ) is the peak industry body representing caravan parks in Queensland. Established in 1966, we provide a united and informed voice for the Queensland caravan parks industry. As a professional, solution focused association, we encourage and support industry best practice across all areas of business by providing our members with leadership, support, networking, professional development, and promotional opportunities.

There are currently 445 full and associate members of CPAQ, made up of caravan parks (catering for tourists and residents) and campgrounds, large and small, from all corners of the State, industry suppliers, tourism businesses, plus regional and local tourism organisations.

We seek to work with both state and local governments to balance the needs of the consumer with those of the Government and industry. Further we actively strive to ensure not only that minimum standards within parks are met, but that over time these industry standards are in fact driven higher.

## Caravanning Queensland

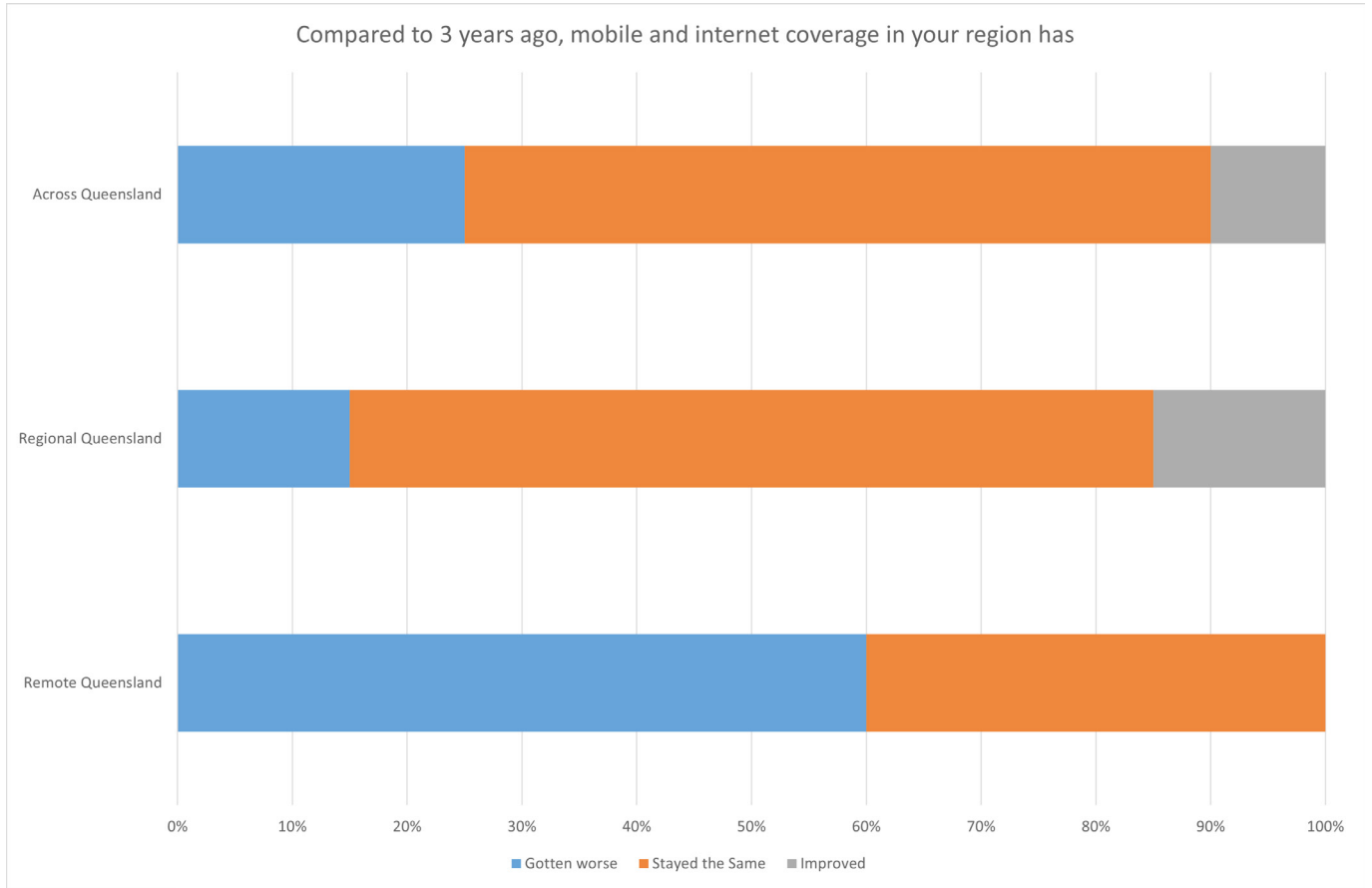
We trade under the brand **Caravanning Queensland** which joins the two related but separate peak industry bodies in Queensland:



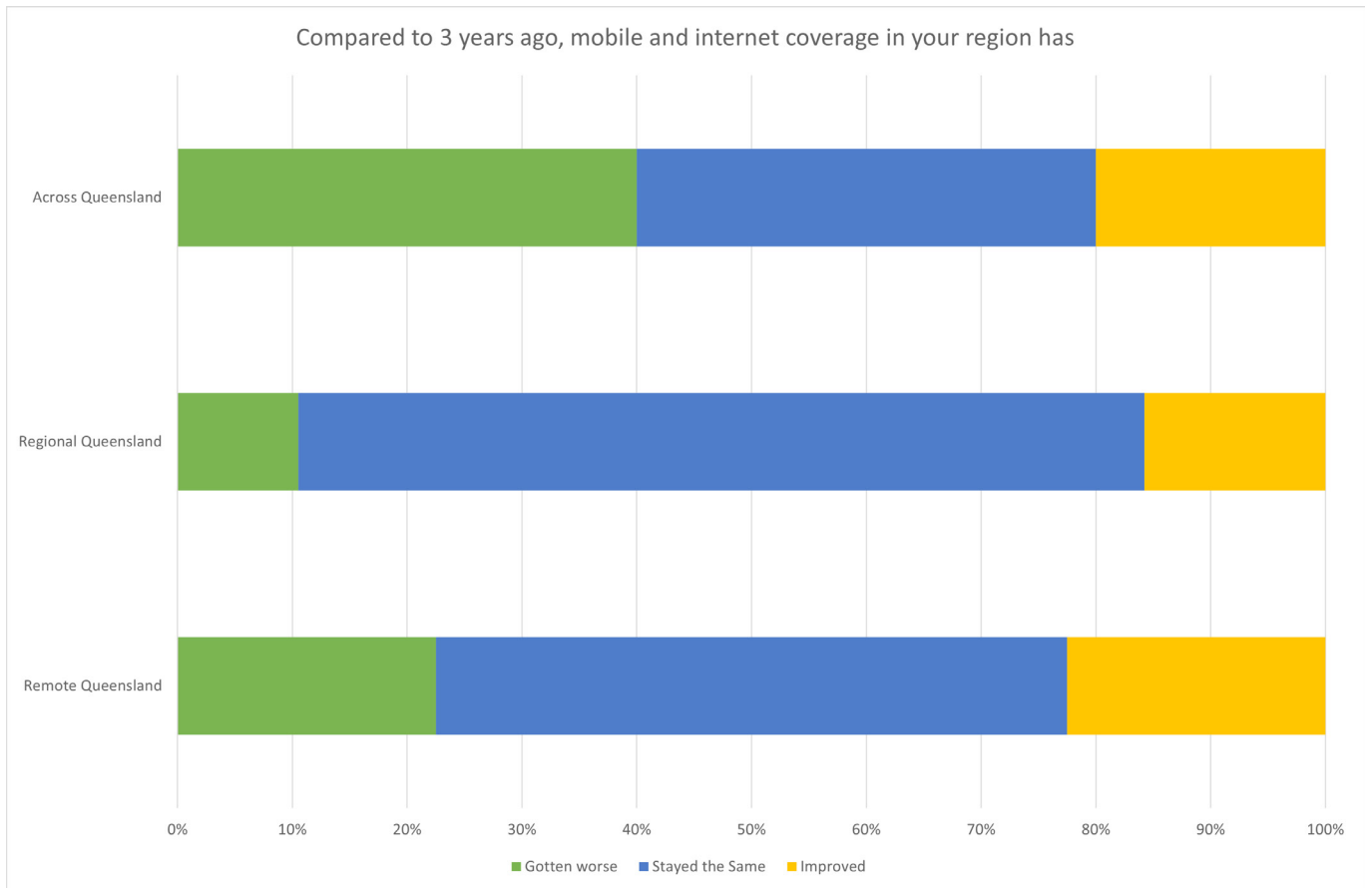
**Caravan Parks Association of Queensland (CPAQ)** the voice of the caravan park owners and operators and the associated supply chain in Queensland.

**Caravan Trade & Industries Association of Queensland (CTIAQ)** the voice of the trade sector in the caravan and camping industry in Queensland with a membership made up predominantly of retailers, manufacturers, hirers, repairers, and suppliers in the caravan and camping industries.

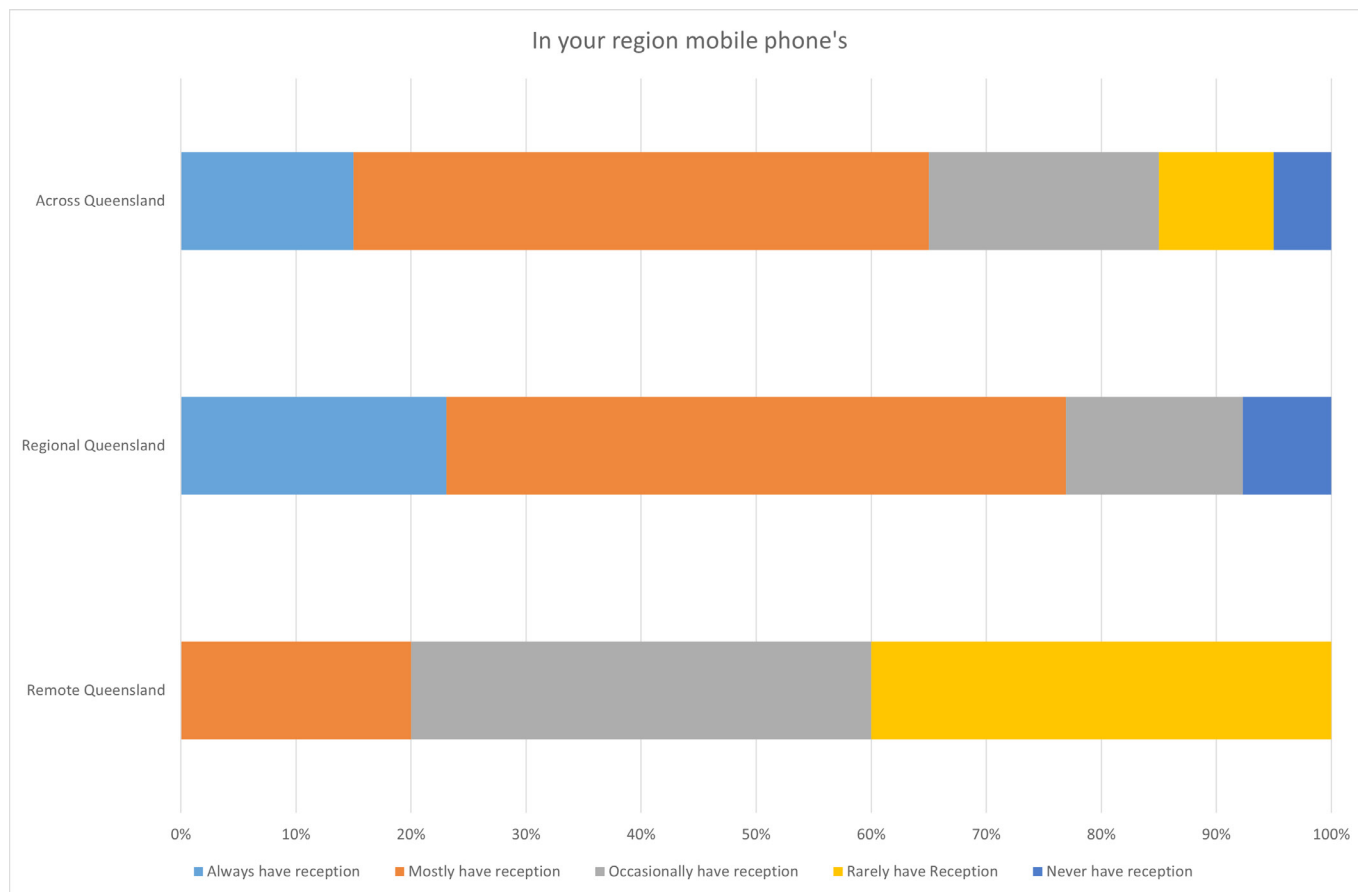
## 2021 Survey Results



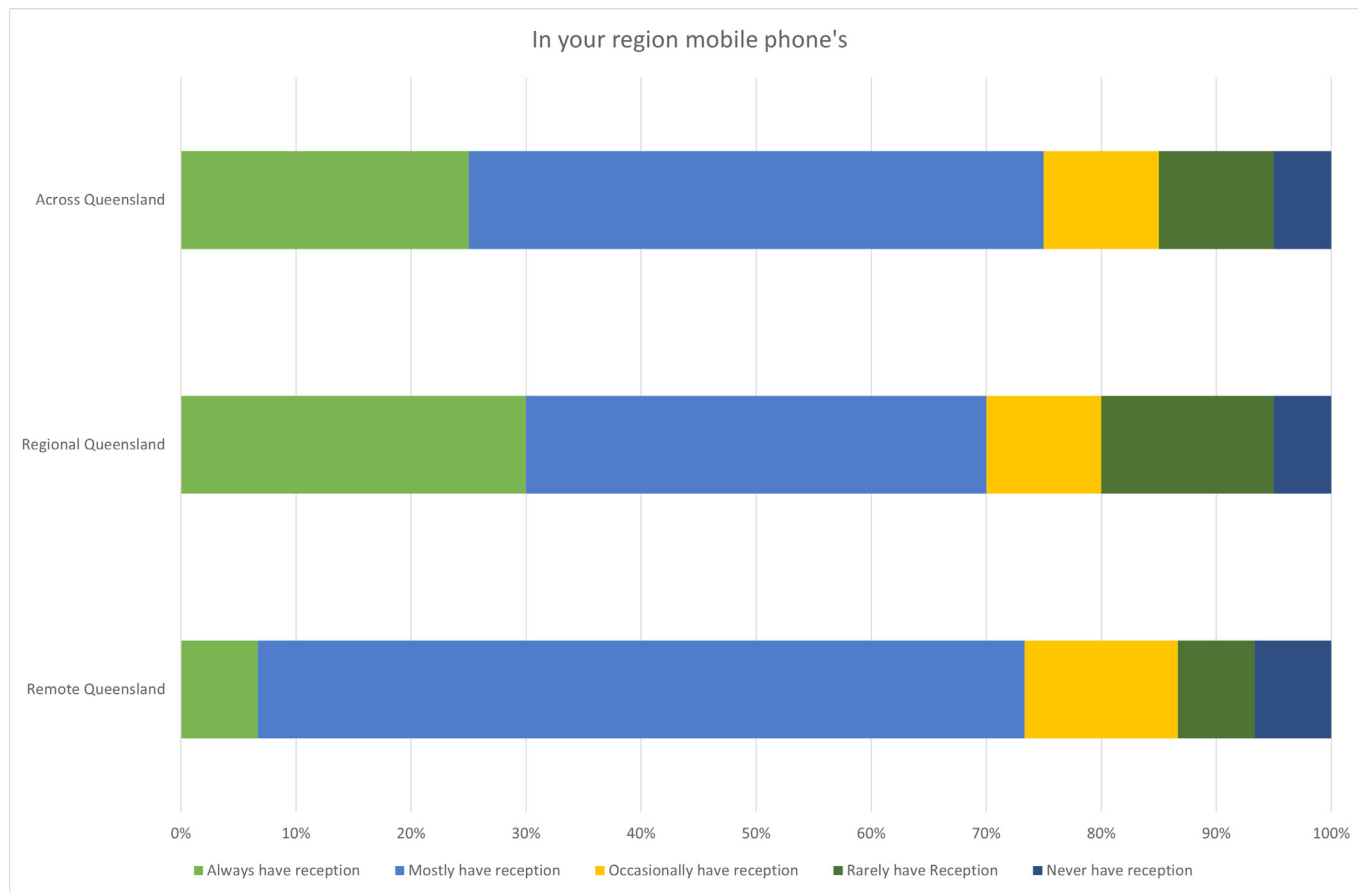
## 2018 Survey Results



## 2021 Survey Results

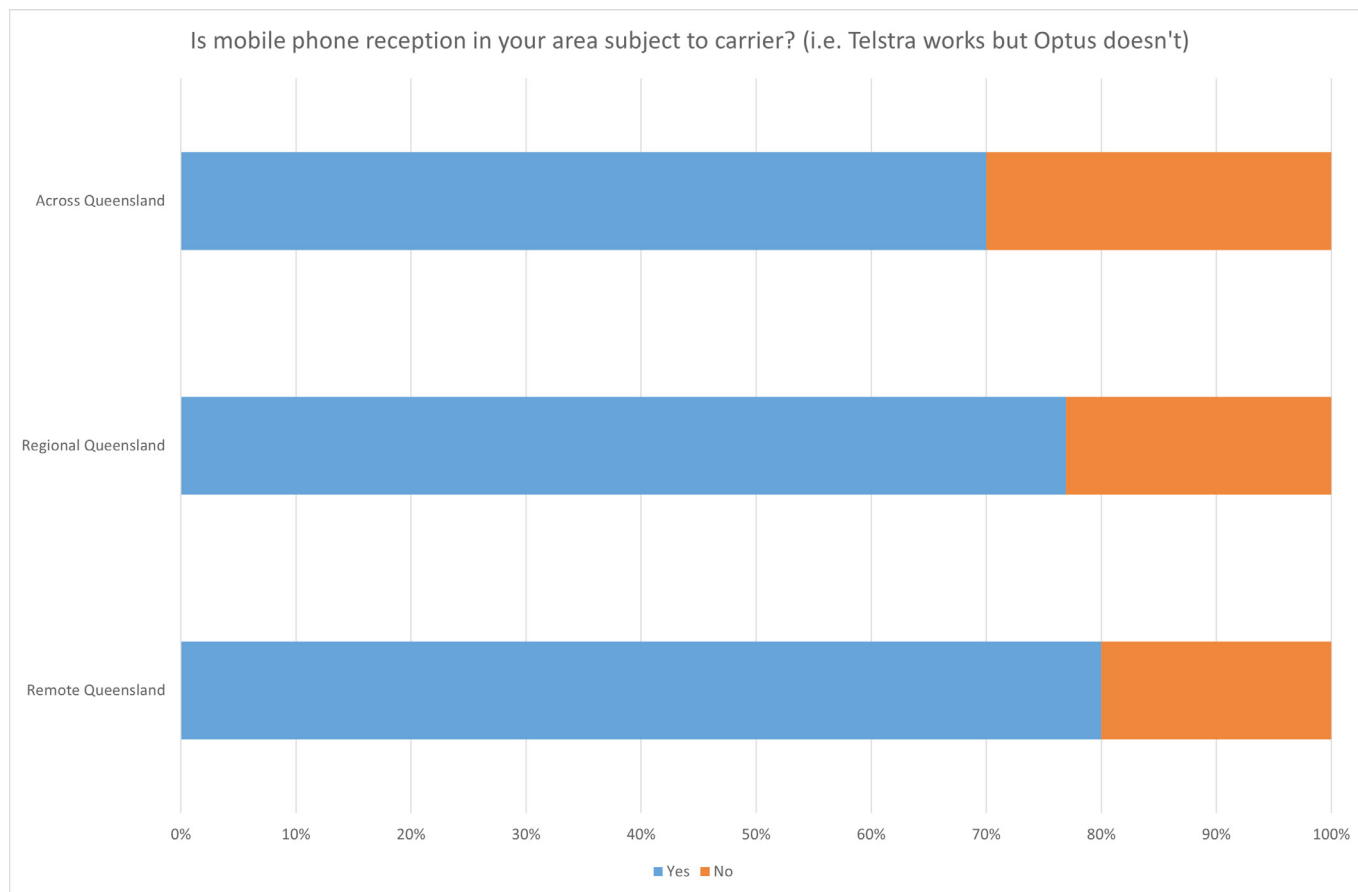


## 2018 Survey Results





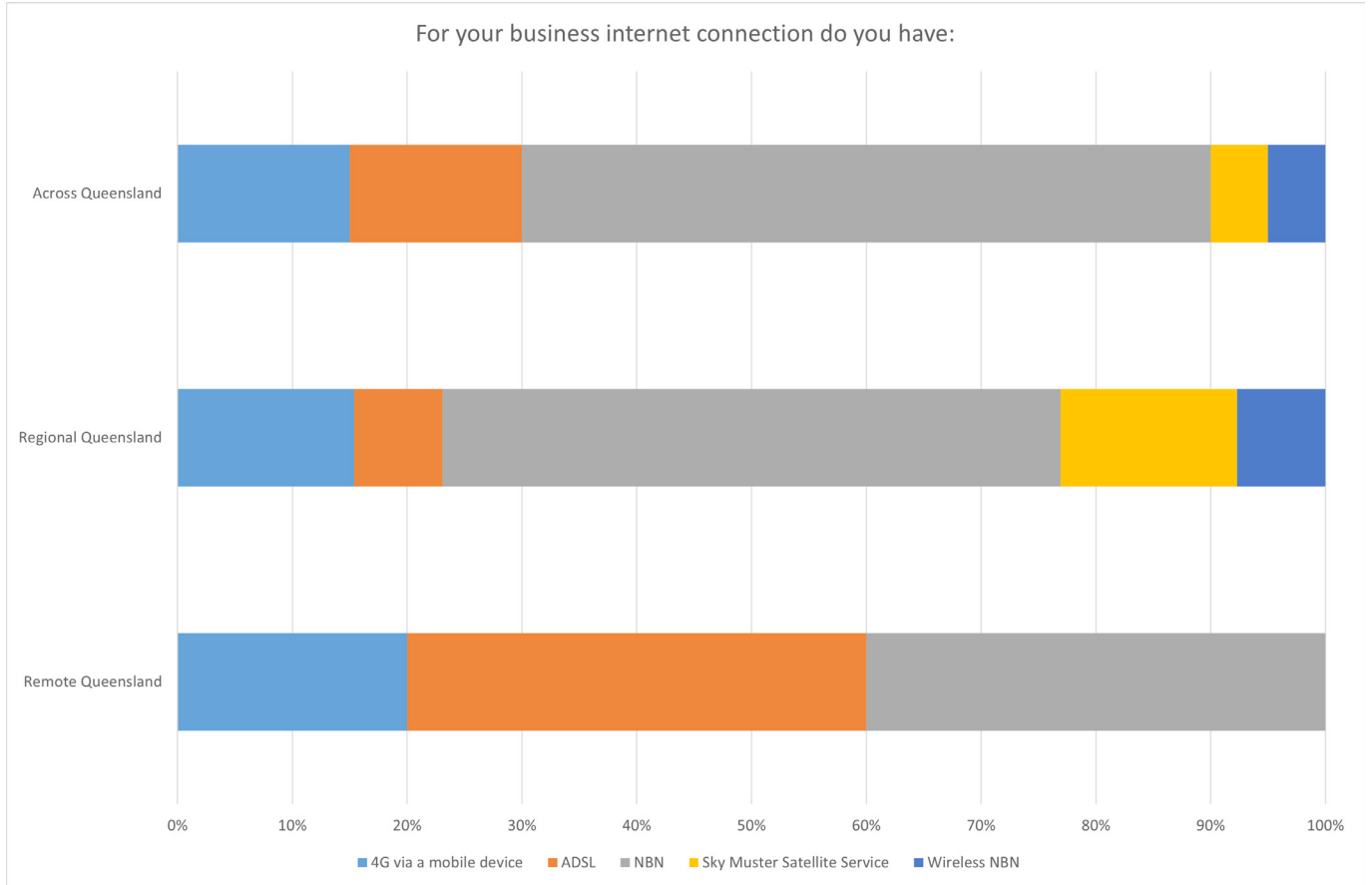
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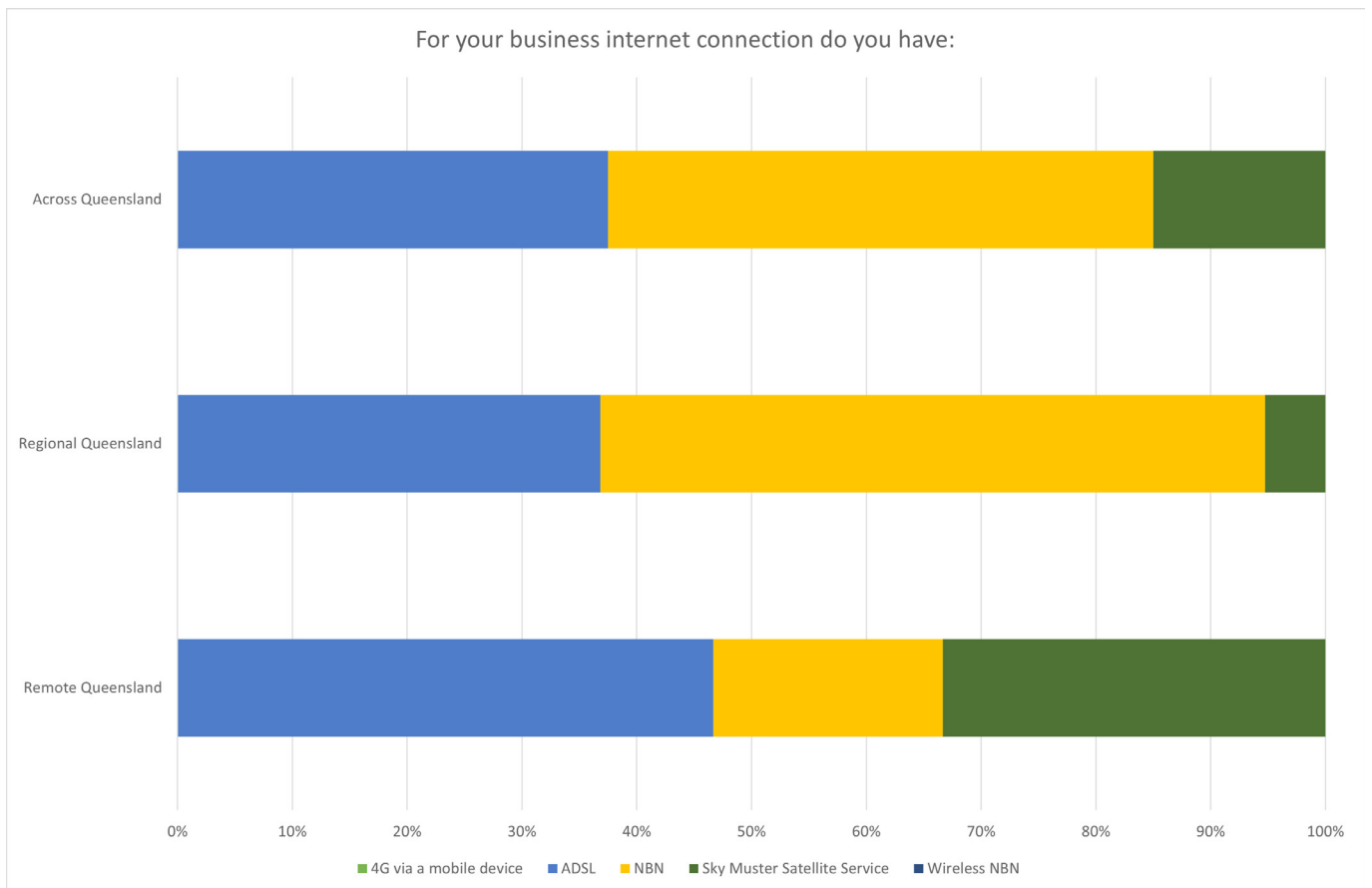
## 2018 Survey Results

No comparable question asked in 2018 Survey

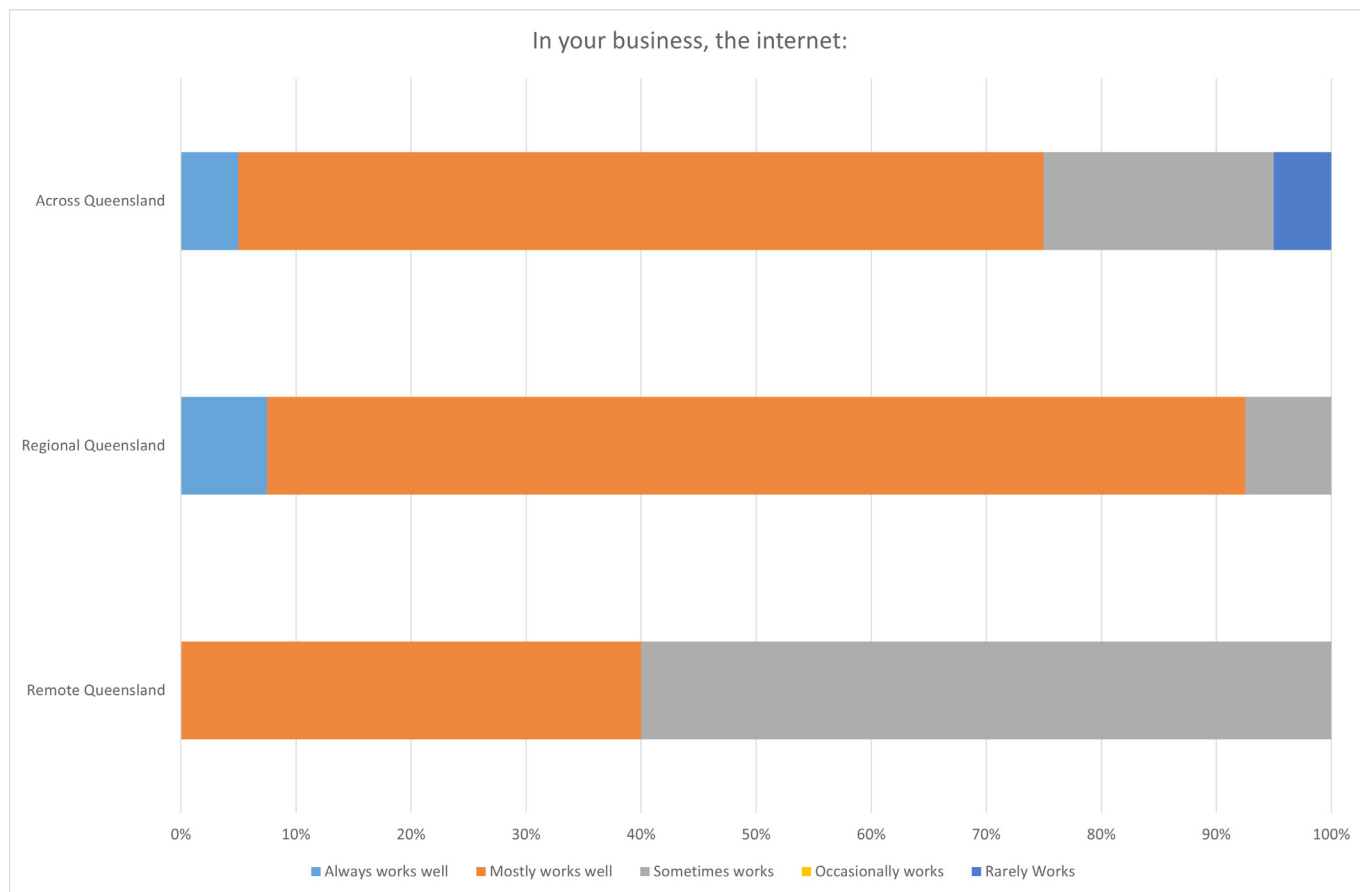
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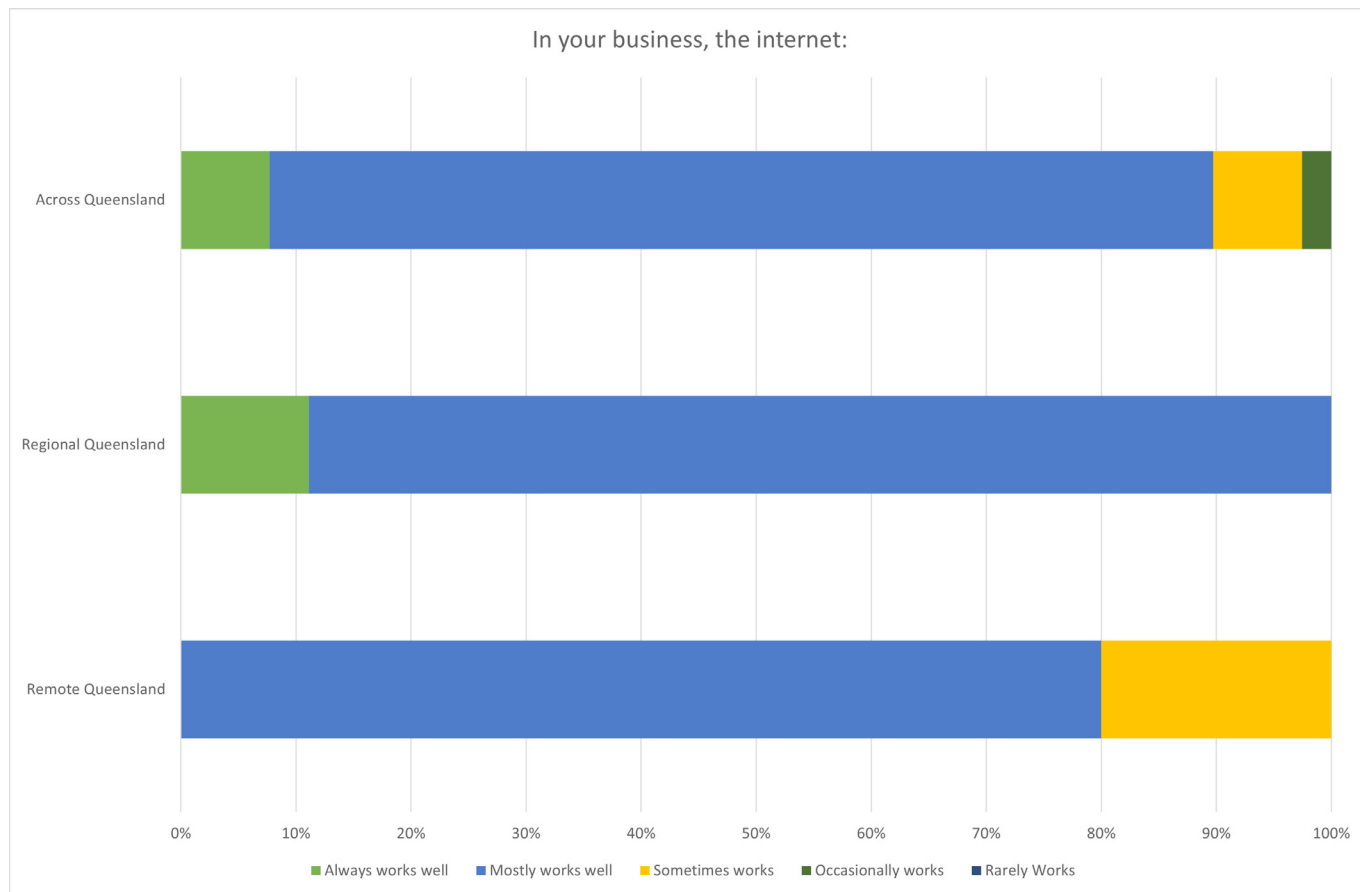
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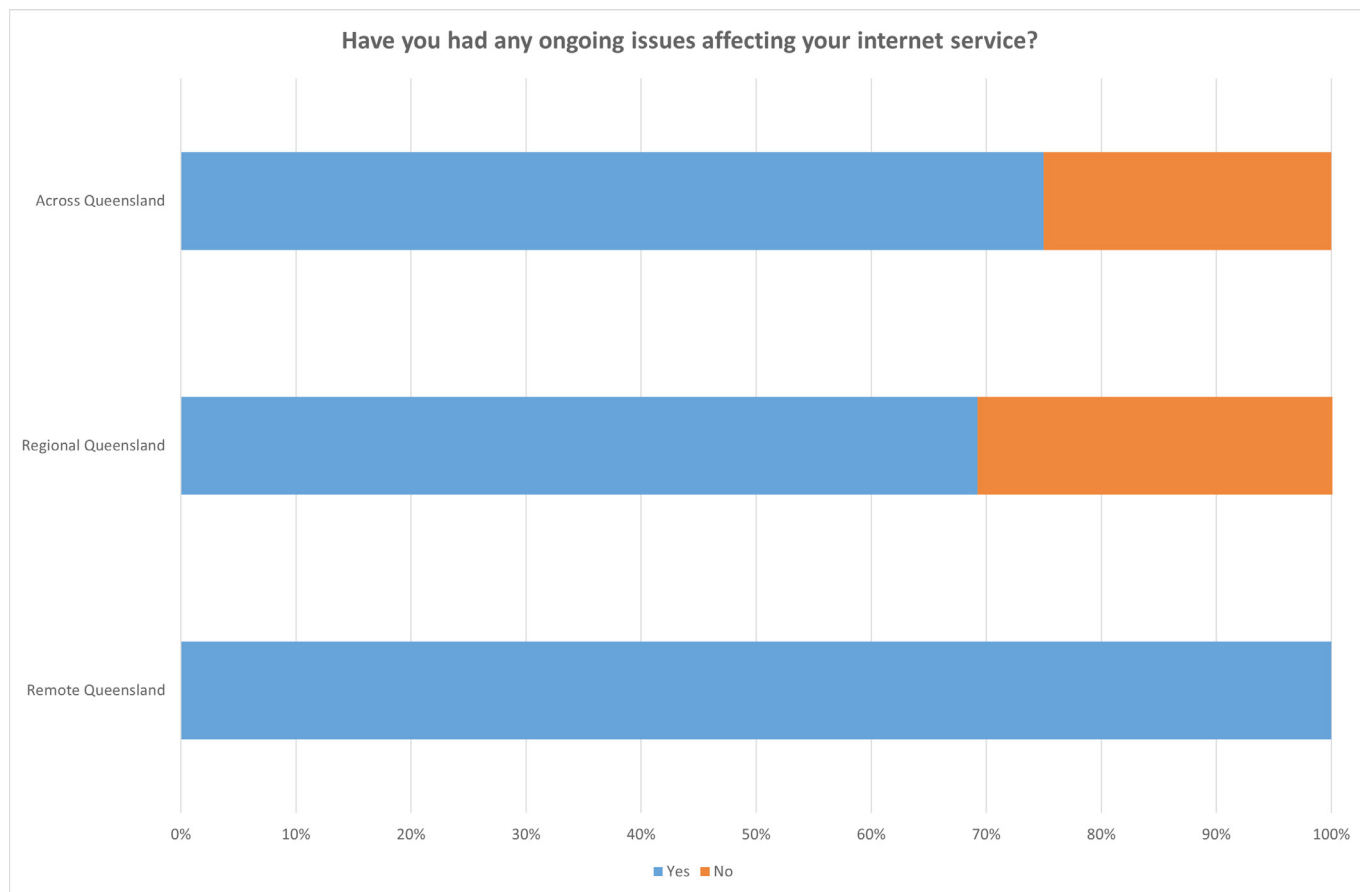
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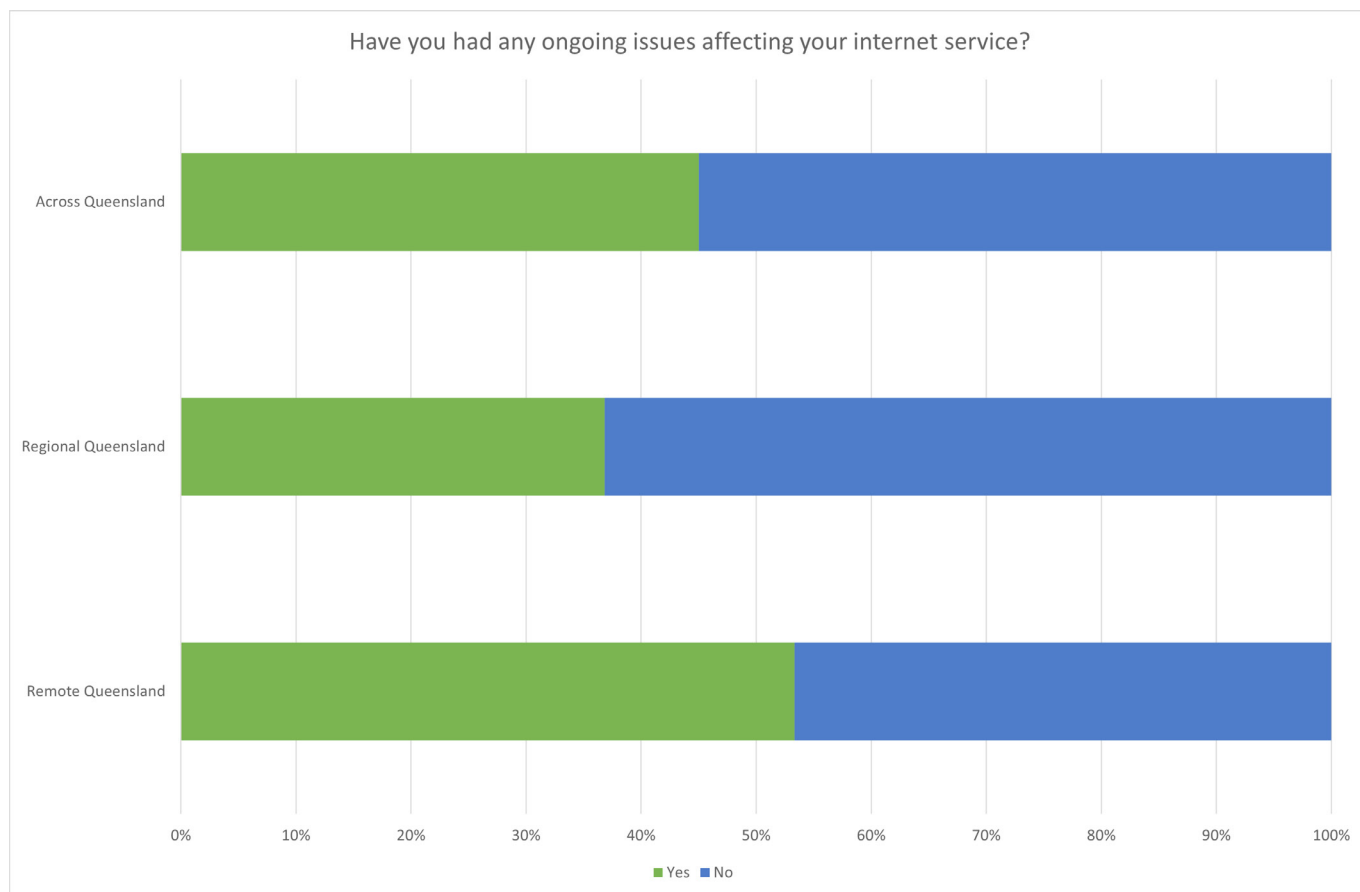
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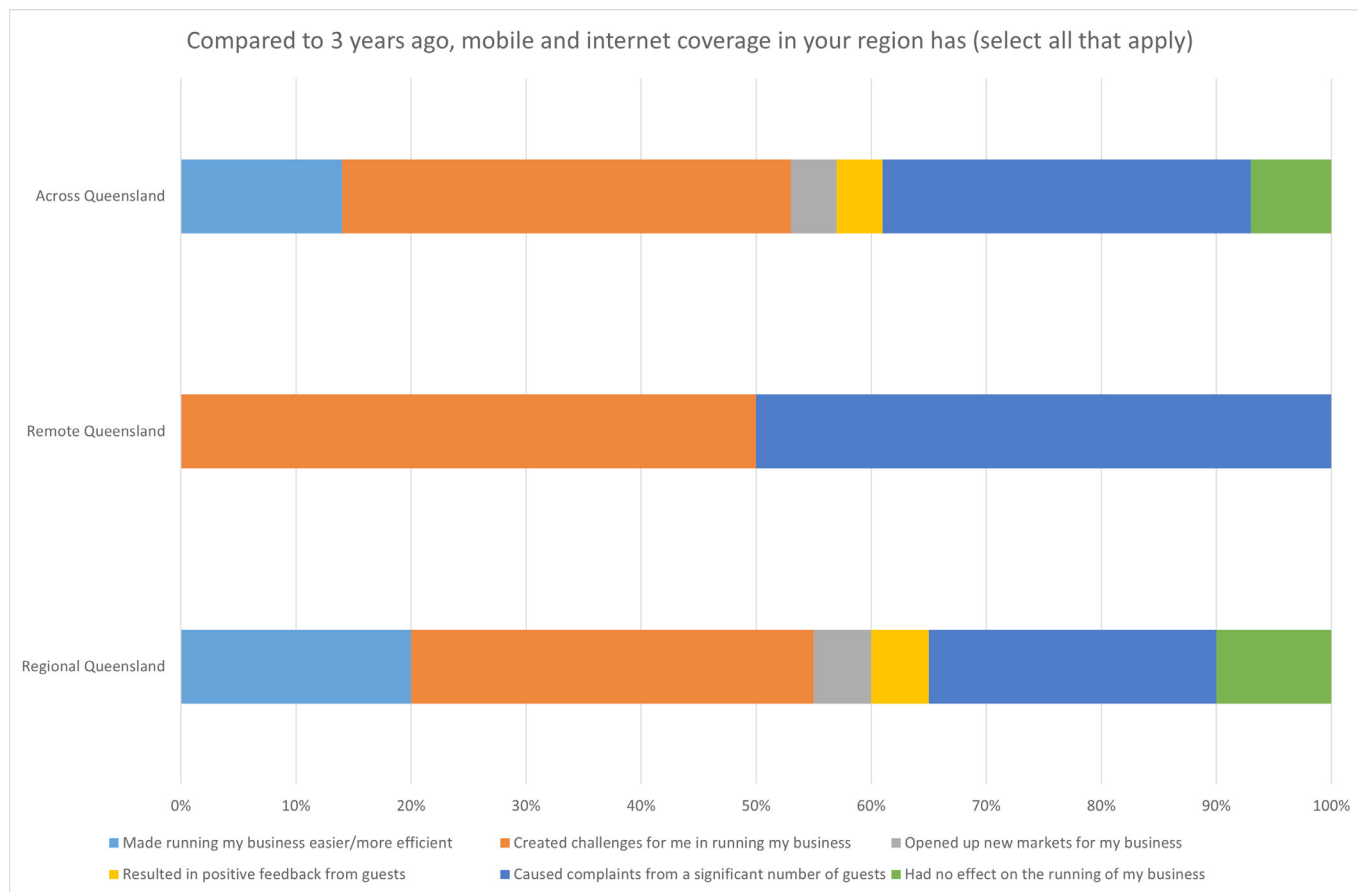
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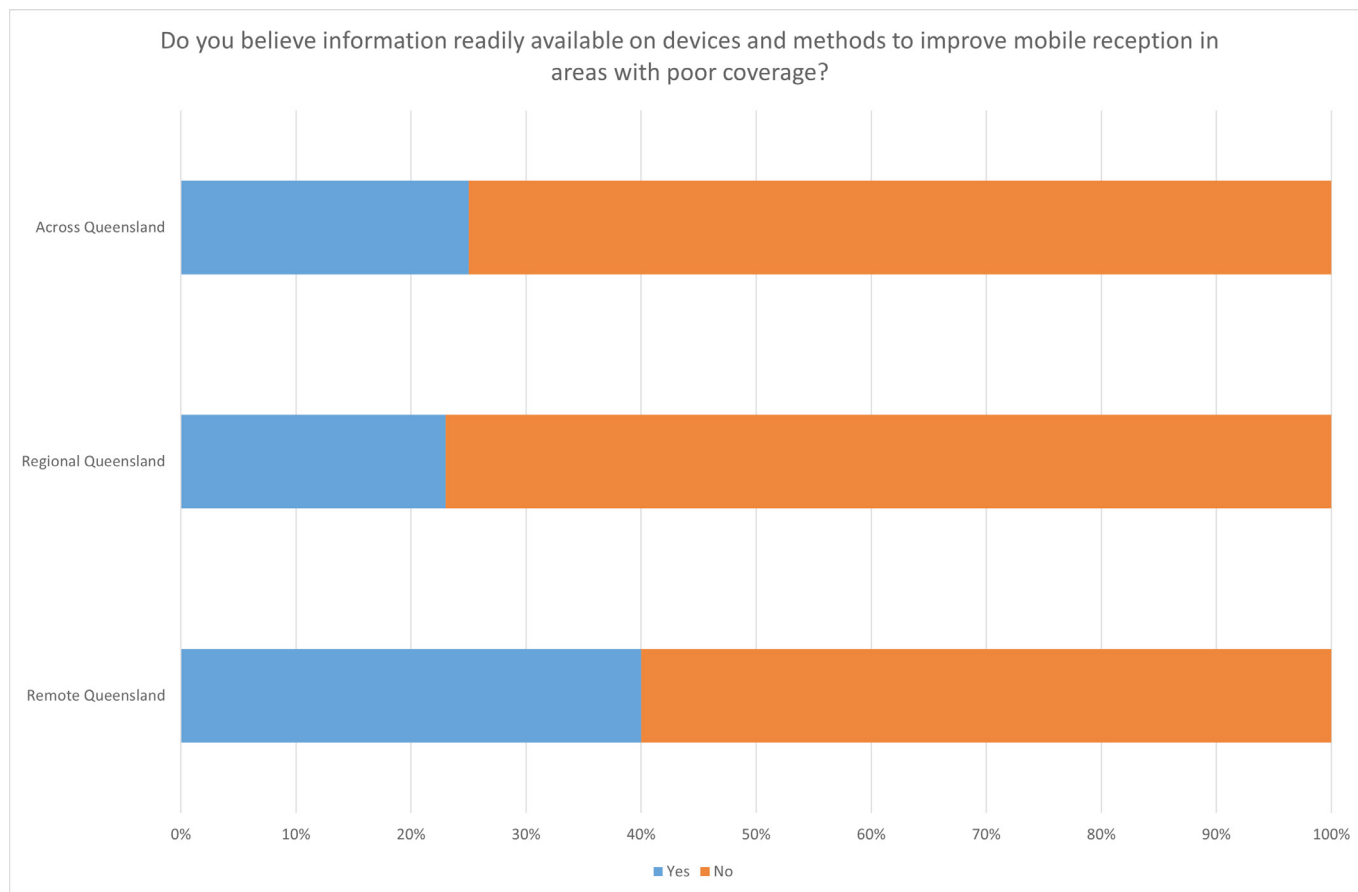
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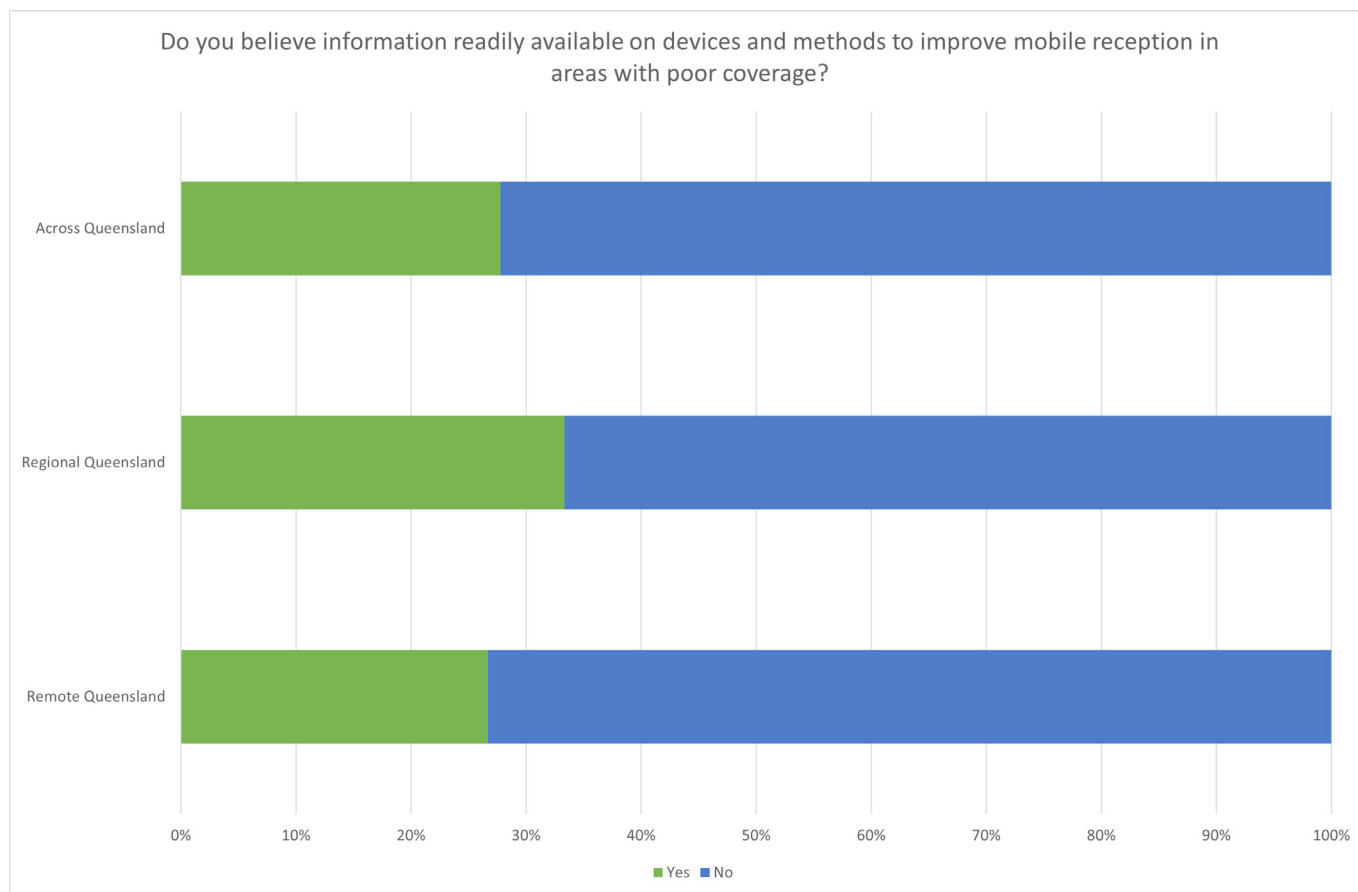
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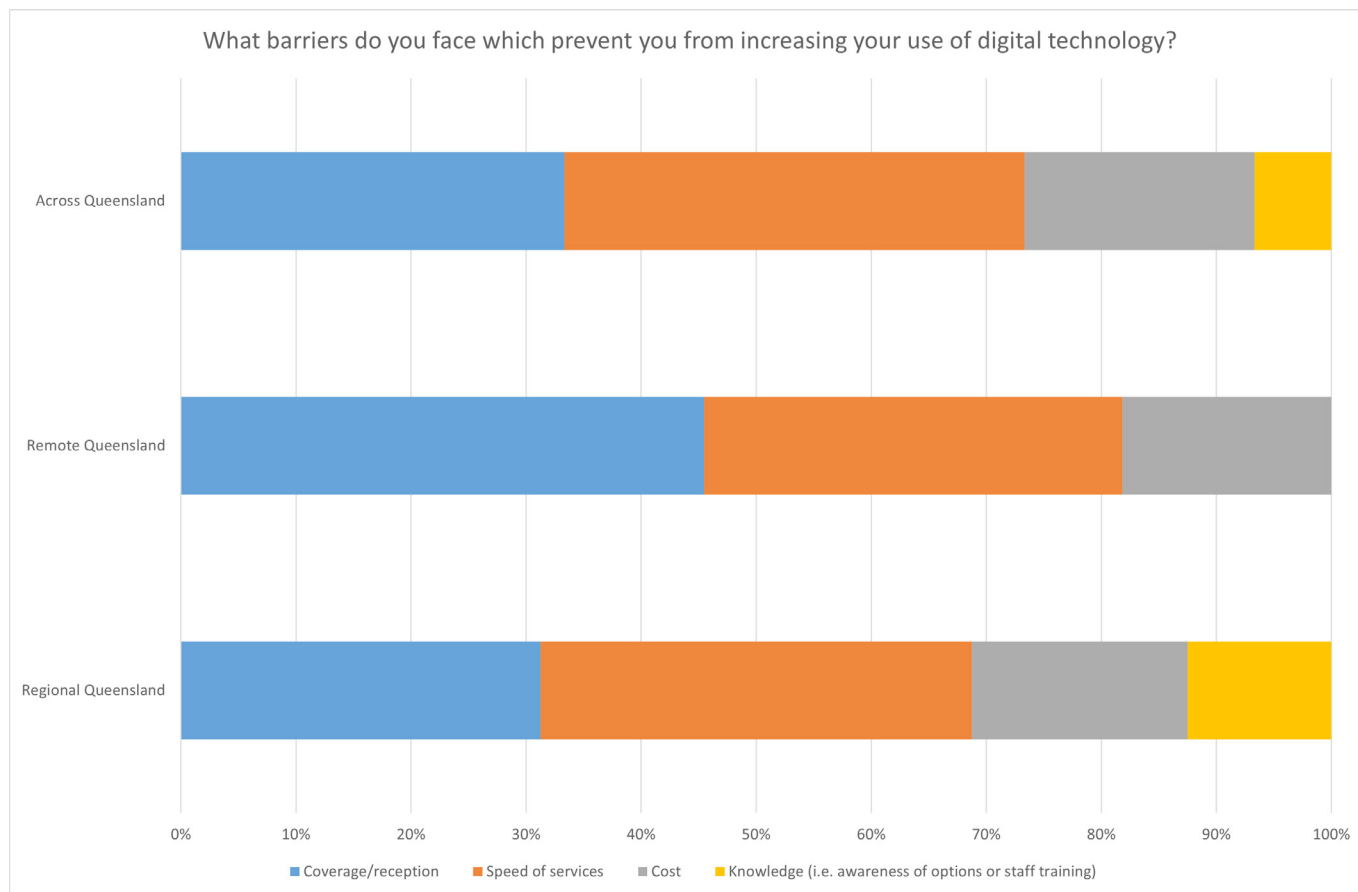
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## 2018 Survey Results



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