GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL

30 September 2021

The Chair
Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP
Regional Telecommunications Review Committee
secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

Dear Sir

RE: SUBMISSION TO REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

Please find Council's submission below to applicable questions raised in the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021 Issues Paper.

1. **What telecommunications services are required in regional Australia to meet current and future needs? Are there any things regional communities and businesses need to do, but can't, on their existing services?**

   It is recognised that significant improvements have been made with regard to internet services with the roll out of the NBN, particularly with improved satellite services. The launch of Sky Muster Plus and Business Satellite Service products in 2019, with the provision of increased unmetered data and access to business-grade services, has been of significant help to rural and remote areas.

   However mobile services remain poor across much of the Glen Innes Severn Local Government Area (LGA). The National Mobile Black Spot Database of Reported Black Spot Locations indicates that Glen Innes Severn has 16 localities with no coverage and a further 14 localities registering poor or no coverage. This lack of suitable coverage is a significant impediment for our agricultural industries in doing business.

2. **What changes in demand, barriers or challenges need to be addressed when it comes to telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia?**

   It is of significant concern that with the rollout of fifth generation (5G) mobile networks that it is proposed to turn off the 3G network. In many rural areas the 3G network continues to provide a better service than 4G. Australia's three major mobile network operators, Telstra, Optus and TPG Telecom continue to have a focus on improved services for the city and large regional centres leaving rural and remote areas lagging behind.

   Whilst there are plans from Telstra to cover 75 per cent of the population with the new 5G network this year details of this roll out are sketchy at best. Again, whilst it is appreciated that the Government is supporting trials of new 5G uses in sectors like agriculture details of the 5G Innovation Initiative are limited.

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3. **How have the Government's policies and programs affected telecommunications service outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia? How can these be improved?**

Concern exists around the Federal Government's Black Spot Program, particularly with the main Telcos being the only organization who are eligible to make an application under this fund. Many mobile black spots are now in low density rural areas making poor business cases for the cost of building new infrastructure by Telcos.

The announcement of Round 5A of the Federal Government's Black Spot Program demonstrates the lack of willingness by Telcos to address the Black Spots in remote areas. Round 5 A funding was a direct result of the lack of applications in Round 5, with funding from that round unspent. This would appear to indicate a lack of willingness by Telco's to provide coverage to areas that are remote or deemed unprofitable.

4. **How do service reliability issues impact on regional communities and businesses? How do outages, including in natural disasters, impact on communities and businesses?**

During 2019 the Glen Innes Severn LGA experienced catastrophic bushfires resulting in the significant loss of homes and two (2) deaths within the Wytaliba community. In 2021 flooding cut the Wytaliba community off from Glen Innes for a number of days. Improved mobile coverage will not prevent these issues however it would make managing the crisis easier.

7. **What can be done to improve the access and affordability of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities?**

The use of existing and the building of new infrastructure provides great opportunities to increase coverage. These include new wind turbines and transmission lines. The use of solar for new mobile towers will also potentially reduce the cost when comparing the cost of extending electricity to remote locations.

Yours faithfully

Craig Bennett
GENERAL MANAGER