



The Bellingen Chamber of commerce is providing a submission to the 2021 regional telecommunications review.

NBN has split the town of Bellingen between Fixed Wireless (FW) Technology and Fibre to the Curb (FTTC). After 5 Years, less that 50% of eligible NBN Fw subscribers have taken up the offer to switch to NBN FW. Further, after 5 years NBN is not able to offer a stable FW connection delivering a minimum 25/5, making business use and in particular video conferencing problematic, harming the local economy. This is in contrast to a near 100% take up of NBN FTTC and excellent service delivery. We note a significant digital divide in the town that will only be further entrenched with NBN starting to offer upgrades to FTTP for wired users. Residents and Businesses are getting quotes of approximately \$30K within the FW footprint of Bellingen to upgrade to FTTP, again providing an unfair circumstance.

#### **Outcomes:**

The Bellingen Business Chamber submits that businesses and consumers located regionally currently allotted to NBN Fixed Wireless (FW) technology and within regional town boundaries (and in particular Bellingen) that are split between wired and wireless NBN technologies, be offered upgrades to Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) on the same terms NBN will offer consumers and businesses Fibre to the Node/Curb (FTTN/C) upgrades to FTTP (<https://tinyurl.com/578appef>).

#### **The Problem:**

Within the town of Bellingen, NBN has split the town between FW connections and FTTC connections. Currently over 300 homes including more than 20 businesses have been pushed to FW connections within the town boundary (Figure 1). NBN is not able to provide adequate speeds to these areas with uploads regularly less than 2Mb/s. Modern video conferencing requires approximately 1.5Mb/s per computer (<https://tinyurl.com/4skxw93a>). We note that the SIP requires speeds of at least 25Mb/s down and 5Mbps up (<https://www.acma.gov.au/sip-obligations>).

Speeds in high density FW areas are problematic across the country, but Bellingen is also hampered by much of the FW area being behind the hill and/or trees (Figure 1). It would be difficult for NBN to justify that it is “reasonable” to connect further premises within regional towns (and in particular Bellingen) to FW under SIP wording (*SIPs will be **expected** to connect premises to a high speed fixed-line network. However, where this is **not reasonable**, the SIP will be able to connect premises to a high speed fixed wireless or satellite broadband network.*) (<https://tinyurl.com/wudb6frf>)

At the moment there are businesses in Bellingen that cannot make quality video calls on current services provided by NBN and they are being asked to pay approximately \$30K for an upgrade to FTTP or Enterprise Ethernet (EE) (Payments spread over three years in the case of EE). While the business next door can currently get 100/40Mbps wired connection and will soon be offered a free upgrade to FTTP.

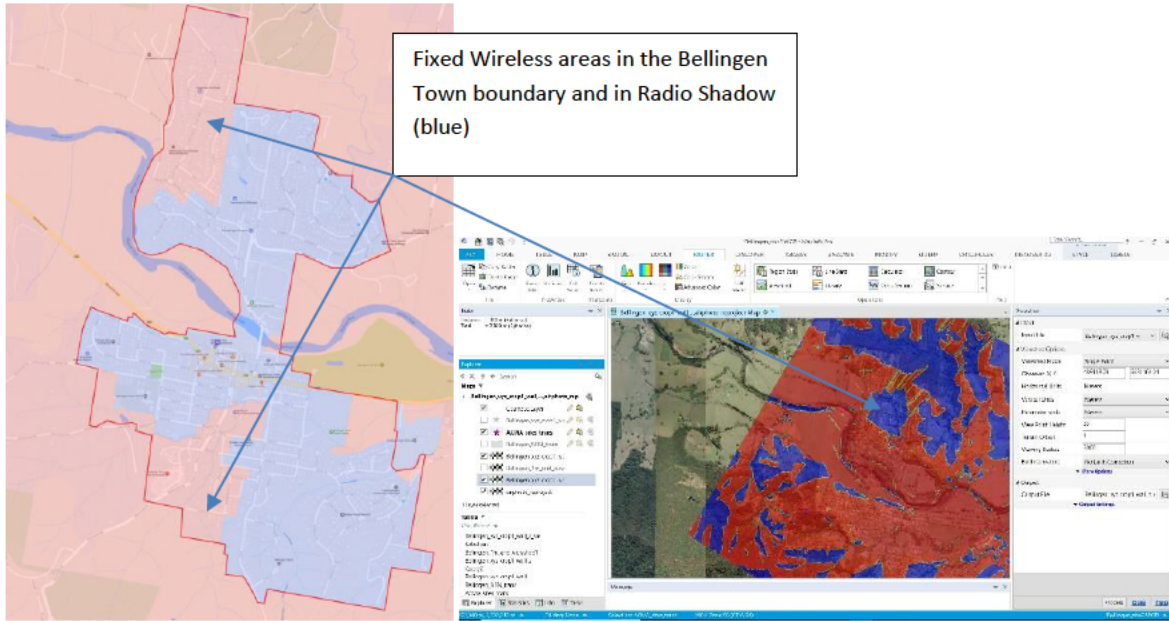


Figure 1 Approximately 300 houses have been pushed to FW in the Bellingen town boundary. Lots within the town boundary are serviced with town water and sewerage and a mix of above and underground telephone services. Currently more than 50% of lots have remained on FW as it is a more reliable connection. Much of the FW area within the town is in radio shadow from trees or the hill (seen in blue shading – above left).

### Community concern:

The Chamber notes that NBN have had over five years to get Fixed Wireless right. The Tower has been upgraded numerous times and even with only around 50% of eligible subscribers taking up NBN FW, NBN cannot meet community expectations. In a simple Facebook poll, 61 comments were received from FW users in town generally not satisfied with the service and cognisant that neighbours are on a stabled wired connection.

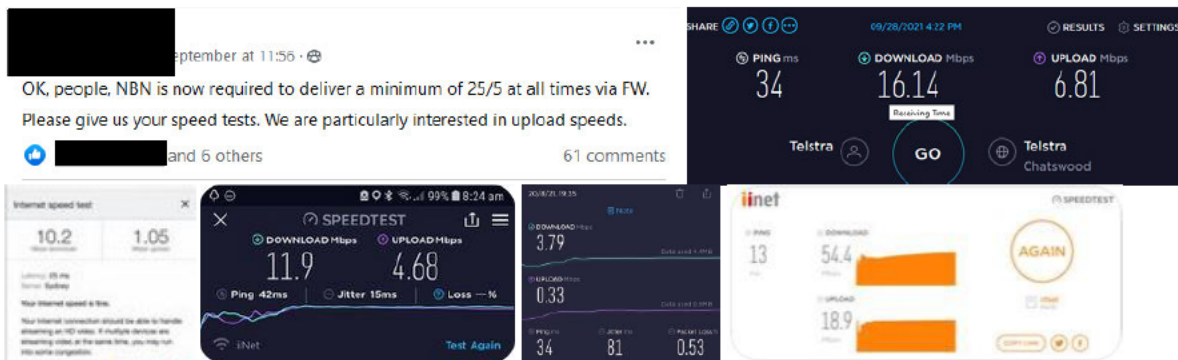


Figure 2 A quick straw poll on a community Facebook site garnered 61 comments. All users are showing highly variable speed tests across a range of providers with very poor upload speeds and marginal download speeds. This is contrasted with a FTTC speed test from in town which is excellent.

### Submission Sponsor:

The Bellingen Chamber of Commerce is a not-for-profit organisation that has been representing the local interests of small, medium and large businesses in Bellingen for nearly 20 years.



The Chamber comprises an executive and executive teams made up of leaders of the local business community and currently represents over 100 local businesses. It works closely with Council, State and Federal political leaders as well as interested parties such as Business NSW to advocate for community needs

The Chamber is a voluntary organisation, with Board members giving of their time and often resources, absolutely freely. Its main focus is to sustainably improve the business environment and economic climate of our community and region.