

28 September 2021

Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

By email: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Re: 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

I am writing on behalf of the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association (KPCA), to provide feedback in relation to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review.

The KPCA's point of difference is that it is a uniquely placed, locally based industry development and advocacy body that represents a diverse range of cattle producers with, on a cumulative basis, significant pastoral land holdings across the Kimberley and Pilbara and the Gascoyne regions of WA (i.e. Northern WA). The membership base is also inclusive of Aboriginal producers and a significant number of related businesses servicing the industry.

In preparing this submission I note the similarities to the feedback that KPCA gave the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

In 2018 KPCA was made aware that public consultations would be held on June 8. This information was received by KPCA on June 2, 2018.

In 2021 KPCA was made aware that public consultations for The Pilbara and Kimberley would be held online, on August 9. This information was received by KPCA on August 6, 2021.

We did circulate information to members and stakeholders regarding this session however were limited in being able to communicate this more broadly (and effectively) due to the minimal notice. I know of at least one KPCA member who attempted to dial in to the consultation but was unable to, due to poor connectivity.

Landlines still remain of fundamental importance to the pastoral industry in the north of WA for reliable and cost effective telecommunications. We do however note that in times of severe weather even landlines can become unreliable which can pose significant issues in terms of being able to communicate medical emergencies, amongst others.

Internet services are of fundamental importance in being able to run businesses from a management and administrative perspective however there are reliability and coverage issues.

The Covid 19 Pandemic has made internet services even more important. When our members attempt to hold Zoom or Teams meetings with our Urban counterparts data is scarce and unreliable. Border closures due to the pandemic have also caused a massive influx of domestic tourist to regions and placed even more pressure on precious communication resources.

Blackspot program expenditure has resulted in some improvements to mobile/wireless coverage over the Pilbara and Kimberley regions however the improvements are typically along main highways and into tourist destinations (e.g. national parks) rather than improving coverage across pastoral properties more broadly.

The uptake of new technology to improve the productivity and profitability of the pastoral industry is being fundamentally hampered by the lack of comprehensive, reliable and affordable mobile/wireless coverage across pastoral properties in the north of WA. At the moment, new technology reliant on connectivity can only be deployed across properties if the satellite network is utilised which presents a significant cost challenge/impediment.

Effective and efficient technologies such as remote monitoring of water points, data collection in real time from work sites, OH&S real time capability, the benefits of a real national network telecommunications capability is not just counted in financial terms but also in the Safety and welfare of both remote workers, traditional owners and the animals KPCA members are responsible for.

Internet and mobile phone services are also important to attracting and retaining staff. Many of the phone towers in remote areas provide 3G coverage. 3G is being turned off shortly so KPCA members want to be sure that these towers will be upgraded.

Another large issue is the lack of succession/management plans with towers across the Pilbara. These towers have been installed by mining companies but as these mines shut down there is a huge risk that the towers will also be shut off. This is a huge waste of existing capital that needs to be maintained/upgraded. KPCA would like to see a clear plan by government to make sure these towers are not shut off.

The KPCA thanks the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications for the opportunity to comment on this review of such a vital service to KPCA members.



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Please do not hesitate to contact KPCA CEO Mick Sheehy via email on ceo@kpca.net.au or mobile phone number 0499 331 643 should you wish to discuss the matters raised in this submission further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Stoaate', is positioned above the printed name.

David Stoaate
Chair