



Response to the Rural Telecommunications Independent Review 2021 by the Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

As the Mid West is the region that the Mid West CCI operates over this will be the area (as defined by the WA State Govt borders) that will be addressed in this submission.

The Mid West region in WA is unique region due to its diverse economy of agriculture, aquaculture, various mining resources, and major project such as on shore conventional gas projects, vanadium and sand operations, along with a fast-growing tourism sector. Following two Mid West Economic Summits held in the Mid West in 2021* resenting the current and future opportunities including the emergence of producton of hydrogen. The Mid West is an ideal location and is received unparaelled interest by large industries to the natural assets of sun, wind, available land and highway and coastal location for future exports.

The telecommunication barriers the Mid West faces due to its geographical location outside of Geraldton metro area is cause for great concern for future economic growth due to a stagnant and diminishing telecommunications service. With individual farming groups & families now taking up more acreage in their programs further reducing regional populations, whilst productivity is increasing it gives no incentive for commercial reasons for any telecommunication players to have any part in the region other than Telstra who is there due to their historical presence of having infrastructure present prior to becoming a listed entity (Telecom) With the lack of competition and a lack of interest by Telstra to service the area meaningfully as there is not the commercial returns means there is limited choices for businesses and community in choosing a carrier.

- For the Mid West reported poor customer service experiences with Telstra have led to ongoing frustration. Telstra drives callers to go online however with diminished data and calling capacity this is not an option in some cases. During the initial Covid lockdown and post the reopening of the intrastate borders calling to a Telstra call centre has also proved to be a time consuming issue. Call times are extensive as one would presume it is because overseas call centres are operating with a reduced capacity due to their own country's issues with Covid. There is also a limited understanding by the call centres as to the issues suffered by the regions and the impact of an outage which can allows network issues to go undetected.
- With no transparency on the network fault report repair times, once reported there is a growing despair in the regions for businesses on issues being repaired in a timely manner so businesses can return to operating (banks, supermarkets, farmers) just some examples of when the network is down cannot operate. Ongoing frustration with an unreliable service causes business to close or divest.

- Regional Network faults - again as there is no transparency on network faults –no clarity on reporting to repair times. A customer may report on their own outage (through standard customer service lines which will only report on individual accounts)
- There is a concern in the Mid West on the diminishing support for landline-based services, ADSL and 3G being turned off that our regional SME businesses will be required to invest in infrastructure worth thousands of dollars to continue to operate. This has been put to the Chamber a number of times by the telecommunications business operating that this is the only option for these businesses. If a business is negatively impacted because of where they operate when Telecommunication businesses have received government funding to improve their services (Mobile black spots). Then as these regional businesses are negatively impacted and cannot hope to operate with a similar service to our metro cousins then either more investment into enabling better service and capacity is required. If we wish to encourage business and people to the regions improved connectivity is a key part of the offering.
- With our rural businesses (agriculture), transport and tourism and other regional business being driven to take up the online platforms necessary to operate their business needs as required there are still too many mobile blackspots across the region (ie Brand Highway which is a major freight and traffic network, Northampton to Kalbarri a major tourist destination).
- With Government spending on reducing “mobile blackspots” perhaps there could be consideration to open up my competition for other carriers to enter the market. This could be made for a mobile roaming deceleration giving added incentives for other carriers to enter the market. This would enhance competition and allow tourists entering the region a seamless experience. This could be mandated by the ACCC.
- Following Cyclone Seroja the Mid West experienced outages (in Geraldton for up to 4 days and in the out regions up to 4 weeks and beyond) this was not only due to our poor power infrastructure it was due to insufficient back up power in the exchanges and network. Once one critical transmission tower lost power (and the back up ran out) all the downstream towers were then down. This affected services to Exmouth.
- A key issue now identified in the Mid West region along with the poor performance of our phone network is capacity. Phone signal will show as full coverage however with the added traffic on the line due to increased useage by operating businesses and tourist traffic means that there is no thru put for any data and calls are consistently dropping out.
- Review is needed of the outdated T&C’s set by wireless service providers which prohibit customers (farmers) from relaying capacity from their main source of business (usually their house) to other sites around their farm.

With the added increase of traffic into the Mid West with tourists, agriculture, construction and mining services our telecommunications is buckling under the pressure. Urgent attention is required and it is hoped that this Rural Telecommunications Independent Review 2021 will put forward some critical recommendations which have been provided.

Access and Infrastructure is needed in the Mid West urgently and telecommunications forms an integral part of our progress.

Some further comments.

In the 2018 Rural Telecommunications Independent Review there were a number of recommendations made that if adopted would made significant inroads to improving regional connectivity. Mid West CCI would like to know out of the 2018 report what was adopted and what was adopted in the Mid West specifically as the “regions” is a very broad term?

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Mid West Economic Summit 2021 – united in diversity <https://midwestsummit.com.au/>

Mid West Major Projects Update

- <https://www.informa.com.au/event/conference/resources/midwest-major-project-update-2021/>