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2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications  
Via: [secretariat@rtirc.gov.au](mailto:secretariat@rtirc.gov.au)

Dear Secretariat and Team

### **RE RDAYMN SUBMISISON TO THE 2021 REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW**

Regional Development Australia Yorke and Mid North (RDAYMN) is an incorporated organisation funded by Federal, State and local government. Our main goal is to promote and facilitate sustainable community and economic development within the regions of Yorke, Mid North and the Southern Flinders Ranges. During the past nine years RDAYMN has worked alongside a number of Councils, businesses, community and not-for-profit groups to increase economic activity and competitiveness and to enhance social and environmental outcomes for our region.

In order to achieve this RDAYMN work collectively through Regional Development South Australia to achieve these outcomes. The unique South Australian tri-partite model allow the South Australian networks an ability achieve the best outcomes for Regional South Australia and work. Spanning 11 offices with over 80 staff on the ground, the team are passionate, active and well connected with their finger on the pulse of each region's development needs. Led by skill-based boards, RDA work in collaboration with all levels of government, community and other agencies forming partnerships to support regional business and the investment ecosystem. Over the last 10 years alone the collective network has assisted over 12,641 businesses and facilitated investment to Regional South Australia in excess of \$2.94 billion. Collectively, we have powerful email databases reaching approximately 30,000 stakeholders every month, and a social media following of 51,000+ connecting us with local, national and global audiences daily (plus, we partner with marketing and PR experts to continue expanding these).

In response to some of the key questions in the Regional Telecommunications Review Issues paper, we provide the following information:

- 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?***

Regional Development Australia (RDA) bodies have extensive on the ground knowledge of their regions including regional connectivity issues. Many RDA's have undertaken region wide consultation on connectivity issues in their respective regions. We would therefore like to recommend that a key element in the implementation of future funding programs include undertaking consultation with their relevant RDAs in relation to areas / sites that they are applying for grant assistance [to improve connectivity].

In some parts of our regions, community members in the agricultural and viticultural sector are unable to get 'real time' connectivity on parts of their land / properties. This often equates to lost sales and business opportunities. A smaller funding round for specific place based initiatives, for "highly localised solutions" is recommended.



**An Australian Government Initiative**



An Initiative of  
**Government  
of South Australia**

#### **Local Government Partners**

Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council | Barunga West Council  
District Council of Mount Remarkable | Northern Areas Council  
District Council of Peterborough | Wakefield Regional Council  
Yorke Peninsula Council | Regional Council of Goyder  
Copper Coast Council | Port Pirie Regional Council  
District Council of Orroroo / Carrieton

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

Hesitancy by some of the larger 'players' to share infrastructure eg, towers. Many regions have existing infrastructure that could also be used, however some of the owners (eg, private companies) seek to charge lease fees at a premium. In some cases (including in our region), the owners appear to prefer letting the infrastructure go unused rather than negotiating a 'reasonable' leasing fee. This existing infrastructure could host multiple telco providers and for multiple uses, eg, community radio, UHF for Councils and Country Fire Services.

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

A smaller funding round (in regard to mobile phone hotspots and digital connectivity) for specific place based initiatives / "highly localised solutions" for projects that, for example, are seeking funding of less than \$200,000" is also supported by RDAYMN.

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

Our region has a predominant agricultural sector and National Parks. During bushfires, the loss of telecommunications poses extreme risks to fire fighters, farmers and community members. Some of our popular tourism destinations, particularly remote beaches and or national parks have limited coverage (both phone and internet) and can pose challenges with regard to tourists' way-finding.

Impacts can be significant to communities and businesses. A recent example for a township on the Yorke Peninsula (Moonta) experienced three outages in an approximate six week period). This meant that businesses relying upon a specific Telco provider for their mobile connectivity...connected to their eftpos processes were unable for three working days, and into the early evening process eftpos payments. Customers who did not have cash had to either attempt to withdraw from ATM's and or the business lost cashless customer business. While the Telco involved undertook immediate steps to rectify the issue it took many hours on each of the three occasions, and the fault was then determined to be related to power and therefore had to be referred on for the appropriate power network to fix the problem. Of note, the week prior to the last outage in May, Moonta was awarded the SA Top Town Award (Inaugural) which was fantastic, however, as you could imagine, it was a little embarrassing for businesses hosting or servicing tourists to have that outage in particular, and more so a real imposition on businesses having so many outages in a short period.



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**5. How might such impacts be addressed to ensure greater reliability? How can the network resilience be addressed in regional areas?**

In relation the example previously mentioned regarding the Moonta township, there are other ways that businesses can prepare for future outages in the way that they are connected and their systems 'talk to each other and back-up systems can be brought online. A number of businesses are unaware of the options that may be available to them (for minimal cost). An opportunity exists there for clever and targeted marketing by provides that can address this issue during outages.

In isolated areas with limited coverage or no coverage, incentives for telco's to invest in mobile and digital improvements where their return may be low could be considered. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the utilisation of existing infrastructure that could be used to 'boost' and improve network coverage is also worth exploring. In South Australia, the three-tiered RDA model approach means that we can assist in co-ordinating the identification of infrastructure assets that could be considered for multiple telco's use / and or other users, particularly with our local government and state government partners.

**6. How did the use of digital services change for regional consumers and businesses during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? What insights for future service delivery does this provide?**

We definitely saw more businesses utilising their social media to advertise what they could provide, offer to customers during the pandemic, for example, hotels and cafes doing online orders, deliveries and takeaways.

Anecdotally, more community members became a bit more tech savvy during the lockdown periods in particular.

Within our organisation and networks, we relied upon online meeting software very frequently, and to a large extent still are.

For the disadvantaged members of our community, however, covid-19 made those already isolated and or at risk, at further risk. Affording mobile phone credit and internet connectivity for some was very challenging and or unattainable. Perhaps disadvantaged people, who are 'in the system', ie through Centrelink, Job Providers, Mental Health could be offered subsidised connectivity?

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

As per previous comment in question 6, a subsidised access to connectivity scheme for our most disadvantaged could be considered by government advocating special rates with telco's for people in disadvantaged, marginalised situations? The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) shows access to, and ability to access, digital resources. Other mechanisms, departments could also be used in identifying those that are most disadvantaged and attempt to support individuals and communities by promoting a 'subsidised access scheme' should it be introduced.



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**8. How can investment in telecommunications infrastructure work with other programs and policies to encourage economic development in regional Australia?**

Potentially through joint / agreed use of infrastructure across multiple telcos' / users / uses.

**11. How can Government better support the rapid rollout of and investment in new telecommunications solutions in regional areas?**

Due to the challenges in covering Australia's massive land-mass with regard to cost of infrastructure and networks, our earlier point, in relation to shared infrastructure, may be appealing and worthy of further investigation.

**12. How can different levels of Government, the telecommunications industry and regional communities better co-ordinate their efforts to improve telecommunications in regional Australia?**

Though it differs from state to state, the RDA network in South Australia is well positioned and experiences to assist in obtaining on the ground intelligence and coordinating aspects in planning through to implementation, in assisting different levels of government seeking to improve co-ordination.

**13. What changes to Government investment programs are required to ensure they continue to be effective in delivering improved telecommunications?**

As mentioned earlier, consideration to place-based solutions and highly localised approach and solutions, especially for regional areas. Heavier weighting to public benefits when assessing new funding programs / applications would be of benefit.

Many isolated areas are used as tourist thoroughfare and or destinations, therefore the capacity to improve public safety in isolated areas would be of benefit. Further, some international tourists in particular find it disconcerting when they find they have no coverage – mobile or internet.

**14. How can regional consumers be better supported to identify, choose and use the best connectivity options for their circumstances, as well as to understand and use their consumer rights?**

Consideration to some pitchy and targeted advertising, marketing to consumers by government on their choices and their rights.



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**15. To what extent is public information on connectivity options, including predictive coverage data and speeds, sufficient to help regional customers make informed decisions? What other information is needed?**

A lot of information is already out there / available, however it can be very difficult to navigate, especially if your digital literacy level is low. We have more telco's in the market / offering different and sometimes cheaper solutions to meet community member and business needs, however, (challenging as it may be) we wonder if a similar approach that is being provided for free (generally) in relation to health insurance and electricity company pricing, ie that of a comparative interactive website for assessing the best comparative package for both needs and price points for businesses and individuals?

We hope this information is useful in consideration and we are happy for this to be a published submission.

Yours Sincerely



Kelly-Anne Saffin  
Chief Executive Officer



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