



**CENTRE FOR
DISASTER MANAGEMENT
AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

Regional Telecommunications Review 2021

Submission:

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications**

30 September 2021

Regional Telecommunications Review 2021

Introduction

The University of Melbourne Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety¹ (CDMPS) Mission Critical Communications Research Unit (MCCRU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

In providing this submission reference is made to prior submissions made by the CDMPS - MCCRU and its Industry Partners:

- The Australian Critical Communications Forum² (ACCF);
- The Australian Control Room Networks Association³ (ACRNA); and
- Australian Radio Communications Association⁴ (ARCIA)

consistent with their respective roles in the critical communications sector and in particular the mission critical (public safety) communications Ecosystem (the Ecosystem) and the role it performs both routinely and in times of natural disasters and pandemic such as we are experiencing at the present time.

This submission is consistent with the CDMPS - MCCRU's strategic intent to support multi-disciplinary collaboration between the research community, government, industry and the community in delivering exceptional public safety outcomes in the context of the Ecosystem.

This submission is one of several provided to various Commonwealth Government Committees and Departments over past years seeking to have the Ecosystem formally recognized as part of Australia's Critical Infrastructure and specifically as a subset of the "Communications" sector.

Where appropriate copies of the CDMPS - MCCRU submissions are provided as Attachments.

The importance of the role the Ecosystem performs in Regional Australia cannot be over emphasised and needs to be considered in the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

Definitions

- *Regional Australia*

In this Submission *Regional Australia*⁵ is defined as the towns, small cities and areas that lie beyond the major capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra) comprising a population of 9.6 million people or 36% of the population.

¹ <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/cdmeps>

² <https://criticalcommsforum.com.au/>

³ <https://acrna.org/>

⁴ [Home | ARCIA - The Australian Radio Communications Industry Association](#)

⁵ www.regionalaustralia.org.au

- *Critical Infrastructure*

The Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy 2015 defines critical infrastructure as:

'those physical facilities, supply chains, information technologies and communication networks, which if destroyed, degraded or rendered unavailable for an extended period, would significantly impact the social or economic wellbeing of the nation, or affect Australia's ability to conduct national defence and ensure national security.'

Focus

The specific focus of this Submission is to:

- (a) Raise awareness of the Ecosystem within the Australian Government's policy framework in the context of its use by Australia's Public Safety Agencies (Law Enforcement, Fire, Ambulance and State Emergency Services) as "*Critical Infrastructure*" to underpin the capability of these Agencies to deliver their services to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of Australians and their communities in both a social and economic sense.
- (b) Identify emerging technologies and programs that will continue to drive the evolution of the Ecosystem e.g., the Public Safety Internet of Things (IOTs), Satellites, Land Management Modernisation Programs and their use of spatial infrastructures, and Digital Twins. In particular a Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability currently proceeding through a Proof of Concept (PoC) for Australia's Public Safety Agencies that will utilise Australia's privately owned commercial mobile phone networks and associated infrastructure.
- (c) Demonstrate policy linkages between current issues being addressed through Government and bureaucracy initiatives relating to critical infrastructure and cyber security.
- (d) Emphasise through (a) (b) and (c) the important role that a "*Fit for Purpose*" Ecosystem performs in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia and therefore is highly relevant to the matters that the Committee will consider through its Terms of Reference in the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

Current Issues

To avoid repetition with the content and recommendations made in previous CDMPs submissions the following four current issues have been identified because of their ability to impact the future direction of the Ecosystem and their relevance to the Regional Telecommunications Review.

- **Critical Infrastructure Legislation**

On 29 September 2021 the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Intelligence and Security (JPCIS) published the results of its review of the proposed Security Legislation Amendment (Critical Infrastructure) Bill 2020 after seeking submissions and taking evidence from organisations potentially impacted by the proposed legislation. The CDMPS made a submission to the JPCIS Review. A copy of this Submission is attached to this Submission.

There has been insufficient time to consider the recommendations arising from the JPCIS review, but it is recommended that the Committee take these recommendations into consideration during the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

In conjunction with the JPCIS review within the Department of Home Affairs Critical Infrastructure Centre (now known as the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Centre - CISC) has been developing, through consultation with industry, reforms to protect critical infrastructure and systems of national significance consistent with the proposed Legislation as it expands the number of Critical Infrastructure sectors to 11, one of which is Communications (incorporating telecommunications). The CDMPS made a submission to the CISC.

- **2020 Royal Commission into Australia's National Natural Disaster Arrangements**

The CDMPS made a submission to the Royal Commission into Australia's National Natural Disaster Arrangements and was subsequently invited to give evidence to the Commission regarding the proposed PSMB capability for Australia's Public Safety Agencies. The Commission identified the PSMB capability as a significant gap in the communications capability of Australia's Public Safety Agencies. A copy of this Submission is attached to this Submission.

In the Department of Home Affairs Monitoring Report on progress with the implementation of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission the Commonwealth Government links several of the recommendations it is responsible for to the proposed Security Legislation Amendment (Critical Infrastructure) Bill 2020 which in turn will be underpinned by the *Critical Infrastructure Risk Management Program* element of the new Legislation.

The CDMPS identified 27 recommendations from the Royal Commission considered relevant to the Ecosystem.

- **Natural Hazards Research Australia**

The establishment of Natural Hazards Research Australia was announced by the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology and the Minister for Emergency Management in July 2020 (NHRA) with the Government providing \$85M to fund ten years of critical natural hazards research.

The NHRA has identified "*Reliable access to critical infrastructure and services*" as a possible research theme for the new Centre on the basis that "disruption to critical infrastructure and

services, including power, water, transport, telecommunications, health and medical care, is a major parallel impact of a natural hazard. Challenges include addressing the complexities in reliability of supply versus supporting the resilience of communities when supply is inevitably affected.

NHRA Projects will also identify the components and practices that; assist critical infrastructure providers to improve risk communications; assist communities to better understand risk at a local or household level as it pertains to access to supply of essential services.”

- **House of Representatives Standing Committee for Infrastructure, Transport and Cities**

In addition to the above issues the CDMPS has also sought advice from the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Infrastructure, Transport and Cities regarding the status of the Government’s Response to the Standing Committee’s Report from its Inquiry into “*The role of smart ICT in the design and planning of infrastructure*” tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, 15 March 2016.

The Report included recommendations to the Government that “public safety communications systems be recognised as critical infrastructure” and CDMPS in its submission to the JPCIS review highlighted this Report.

There has been no Government Response to the recommendations made in the Report and the Standing Committee is currently seeking advice on the status of the Government’s response to the Report.

Summary

This submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021 has identified the importance of the role the Mission Critical (Public Safety) Communications Ecosystem performs in Regional Australia which cannot be over emphasised and needs to be considered in the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021.

In both Regional and Urban Australia, the Ecosystem needs to be considered as critical infrastructure and treated as a subset of the Communications Sector accommodating a range of emerging new technologies, such as Public Safety Mobile Broadband, using commercial market-based infrastructure that will deepen and strengthen the Ecosystem to underpin communications capabilities and capacity of Australia’s Public Safety Agencies in Regional Australia.

Geoff Spring - Senior Industry Advisor (Honorary Fellow)
University of Melbourne - Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety
Mob: +61411130184
geoff.spring@unimelb.edu