Sarah J Thompson

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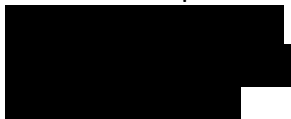
29th September 2021

The Hon Luke Hartsuyker (Chair)
Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee Secretariate
Department Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
Canberra ACT 2601

RE: 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Consultation.

Dear Committee

It seems every day, examples of being driven to online platforms to complete everyday tasks are occurring. More and more I find myself having to use the internet, with increased need for data services, and decreased reliability of it and voice services.

I live in NSW on a major transport route, the Golden Highway, in a small rural community, and have done so for the past 40 years. My family run a large agricultural enterprise, I am an active participant in community, and have roles in national and state organisations. I consider myself educated, self motivated, resourceful, and capable, yet this is at odds with the physiological effects of navigating the "transformative" world of telecommunications, and the ever emerging technologies in this field. I am not joking when I say, to place a call to my service provider, seeking advice, reporting a fault, looking for a solution, requires a in ordinate amount of time set aside, a particular mindset, usually a Panadol and something restorative afterwards.

You ask us to consider what are our telecommunications requirements to meet our needs? I need to have a dependable mobile phone reception. I need a reliable, affordable. and adequate digital capacity to be able to run a number of programs and virtual meetings to enable me to meet my work, business, production, educational and recreational requirements.

As technology has changed, and in order to transition to the best of my capacity from analogue through to 5G , I have invested in satellite technology, an assortment of modems and phones, aerials, and smart antenna's and fixed line phone. I have been through a number of service provider plans, finally with result in a monthly phone bill of approximately $350, a data capacity of 200gb, and a mobile phone that drops out, and a connection, that is often disrupted. The fact I can't depend on mobile service, means I do depend on my fixed line phone.

I use the internet for my business, for banking, for correspondence, for fulfillment of regulatory requirements, for recreation, for security, for education, for virtual meetings, for video content, I am required send and receive quite large files, and more. I use the internet to support primary health care, with physiotherapy programs, doctors consultations or for

example seeking palliative care support when my husband was dying, and in all of these applications, I cannot say I have the confidence that at any given time the service I need will be fit for purpose.

The assumption of adequate mobile coverage according to mapped areas differs from the real experience. The assumption of broadband capacity also differs to the lived experience. Some time ago, that might have been manageable, as face to face, or phone service was an option, but as we are migrated to everything on line, rural, remote and regional communities are being left behind. Covid has shone a light on the inadequacy, and inequity, not caused it.

Our communities are now dependent on telecommunications, just as they are dependent on electricity. We are expected to navigate through a language of fixed wireless, wireless local loop, latency, bandwidth, low orbit satellites, capacity, frequency, to understand the difference between each alliteration of each new innovation, for example, to find the best solution for ourselves. Service providers are interested in commercial viability, not in supporting agnostic tech solutions. We are advised to get upgrades compatible with new technology, or booster equipment, without trial, or return. We invest thousands of dollars chasing the connectivity we need. This is one area where increased agnostic technical support, and advice, could be constructed, so fit for purpose solutions could be delivered.

Providing high quality services in regional, rural and remote Australia is a challenge. Unless there is significant investment, people in these areas, will not be able to avail themselves of the opportunities the digital revolution could afford them. There is an organic shift of city to country, and in the larger centres the telecommunication requirements may be met, but in the smaller, regional, rural areas, the digital capacity is not there for family social, recreational, educational, health, and business needs. We lose workforce because of it.

Greater government investment is needed to resource infrastructure and upgrades to deliver higher quality affordable equivalent broadband services to meet consumer and business needs.

It is time that telecommunications was recognised as an essential service, like electricity.

I don't have the answers, but I hope my comments illustrate the lived experience. We don't aspire to all the bells and whistles, just want the service we need to "turn up" and enable us to do the jobs, and keep us connected, safe and healthy.

Yours sincerely

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