

# Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

#### Contact Details

Name of respondent:	[REDACTED]
Name of organisation:	Cobar Shire Council
Phone:	[REDACTED]
Email:	[REDACTED]
Website (if applicable):	<a href="http://www.cobar.nsw.gov.au">www.cobar.nsw.gov.au</a>
Date:	18.2.14

#### Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? Yes  No

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

#### Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address [mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au](mailto:mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au)

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager  
Mobile Coverage Programme  
Department of Communications  
GPO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.

All communications to be addressed  
to the General Manager  
PO Box 223  
Cobar NSW 2835

Telephone: (02) 6836 5888  
Facsimile: (02) 6836 5889  
Email: mail@cobar.nsw.gov.au  
Website: www.cobar.nsw.gov.au  
In your reply please quote:

GJW:AJS:T2-1



Cobar Shire Council Offices:  
36 Linsley Street  
Cobar NSW 2835  
ABN 71 579 717 155

*"Regional Centre in Western NSW"*

The Manager  
Mobile Coverage Program  
Department of Communications  
GPO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2615

24 February 2014

### **Submission to the Mobile Coverage Program Discussion Paper**

To The Manager

Council has been concerned for some time about the lack of mobile phone reception across our vast shire and your discussion paper is welcomed. Cobar Shire covers over 46,000 sq kms in western NSW. There are large areas that receive little or no mobile phone coverage. There are also 469kms of state highways in the Shire and there is little coverage along this network. This has obvious safety consequences for travellers of the network.

Cobar has a highly transient population that is mostly employed in mining and agriculture industries. The mines require fast data transfer rates. Cobar also receives a large flow-through of population along the highway system as we are based centrally from most capital cities and are a large distance from other towns. As people stop they often make use of the opportunity to phone friends and family, use their tablets and computers and consequently put added pressure on the broadband infrastructure.

This submission aims to provide comment on the discussion paper where appropriate and to also offer suggestions on how to improve coverage to our residents.

#### **Current Limitations**

##### *No ASDL2 capacity at local exchange*

Whilst there is mobile phone coverage in the town of Cobar itself, there is no additional ASDL2 capacity at the local exchange. Additional infrastructure is required to increase the wireless system (4G) for broadband use as well as mobile use. An example of the need to do so for Council operations is the inability of Council to install a CCTV system as the local network could not deal with the data downloads.

##### *Lack of towers*

The 4G network stops at Dubbo, 300kms to the east of Cobar. If our system could be upgraded from 3G to 4G, faster downloads would be possible. The Vodaphone network stops at Narromine (265kms east) and whilst Optus does operate in the town

(using Telstra infrastructure) of Cobar, the signal is weak. Telstra is the only real provider of mobile services in the Shire.

In terms of the \$80m Mobile Network Expansion project, Council has concerns regarding the tendering out of the towers, under any of the options. As there is only one carrier that operates in this area, it is unlikely to be of benefit to undertake a tender process. It seems unlikely that another carrier will bid for the work in this area as they currently do not have any network here.

Council believes there are a number of either redundant towers, or underutilised towers across the Shire that could be used to greatly expand coverage. In the past, a number of CDMA towers were erected. This system is no longer used and the 3G system does not provide the same level of coverage. If these towers were used to install mobile receptors, it is possible that coverage across the highway network would be possible. At present, there is little coverage from Cobar to Nyngan (130kms to the east), other than at Mount Boppy.

Increasing coverage across our Shire will have added productivity benefits to the property owners. For instance, they could install cameras at watering points and monitor them remotely. There are also obvious safety benefits if mobile coverage can be expanded.

*Lack of access about and understanding of equipment that improves reception levels*

There are a number of devices that can be used to improve the coverage of the existing network, including using the correct handsets, using patches and aerials etc. Council believes it would be beneficial if there was an information and subsidy system developed to promote the use of these devices.

The subsidy scheme would encourage adoption and the information program would increase the knowledge of landholders of the types of things they can do to increase their coverage. Council believes this knowledge is currently lacking and would be a low cost way of improving coverage.

### **Mobile Black Spots Project**

Under this program communities such as ours will be able to put forward locations to be funded. Local government entities such as the Council can submit an EOI, however you expect us to commit to a co-contribution. Our Council resources are already stretched in a bid to provide much needed services to our community. Often these services are provided by the private sector or other levels of government in less remote communities. They are not the responsibility of local government.

The expectation of government that Council would contribute financially to the provision of mobile phone services is another example of why remote local governments are struggling to remain viable. This is NOT a local government responsibility and certainly not one that we could afford to do. It should not be dependent on local government to ensure that there are adequate mobile phone services provided across our shire!

Another option is for large community groups. Given that the total population of the Shire is around 5,000, we do not have a community group with the capacity to provide such a co-contribution either. Is this another reason we should miss out?

### **The Assessment Criteria**

The assessment criteria seems to be biased towards larger population centres, once again disadvantaging our community. In determining the value for money to the Commonwealth (criteria 5) – the number of premises covered is a criteria. Many of the potential users out here are tourists – that is not accounted for. The premises are few and far between. The value of industry could be taken into account and the productivity savings/business benefits from introducing coverage are ignored. The benefits for economic growth are not accounted for.

One of the assessment criteria is *Commitment from more than one MNO*. In remote areas such as ours it is unlikely to happen as there is only one MNO currently providing any service. This should not disadvantage our communities.

Again, a requirement in the criteria for accessing co-contributions will disadvantage our community's chances of having increased mobile phone coverage.

### **Utilising the NBN network**

Again, this is not relevant to our community as we have no NBN infrastructure, leaving us more disadvantaged.

### **Our Suggestions**

Given the significant cost of erecting new base stations, Council urges the government to look at alternatives, including using existing towers that are located across the Shire. Co-location of services or using towers that are no longer in use is a cheaper means of providing a service, allowing a greater coverage to be achieved. In Cobar Shire we are suggesting that existing Telstra towers at:

- 'Tilpilly'
- Leopardwood Hill, 'Tambua' and
- Coreo (on the APA pipeline)
- Mount Hope (extend the range of coverage available)

could all be utilised to install new equipment and enable mobile coverage.

In this part of the state it would be unnecessary to require all new base stations to be able to support at least two MNO's, as it is likely that only one can operate. That requirement would just add additional cost to the project. Additional towers at

- 'Mountain View', Gilgunnia
- Mount Hope

are required in the Shire.

Council does not believe that the communities should be responsible for finding co-contributions in order to be able to have access to mobile phone services.

Council strongly urges the government to consider an information and subsidy program as suggested, to increase coverage and the use of the current network. The subsidy system would make it more affordable and the information will assist

residents to understand their options and how to increase their ability to access the coverage that already exists.

There are many benefits to be had from improving the mobile network. We want our businesses and residents to benefit and have similar access to the rest of Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary Woodman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary Woodman  
**General Manager**