

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:	Shelley Pike - CEO
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Date:	05/06/14

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

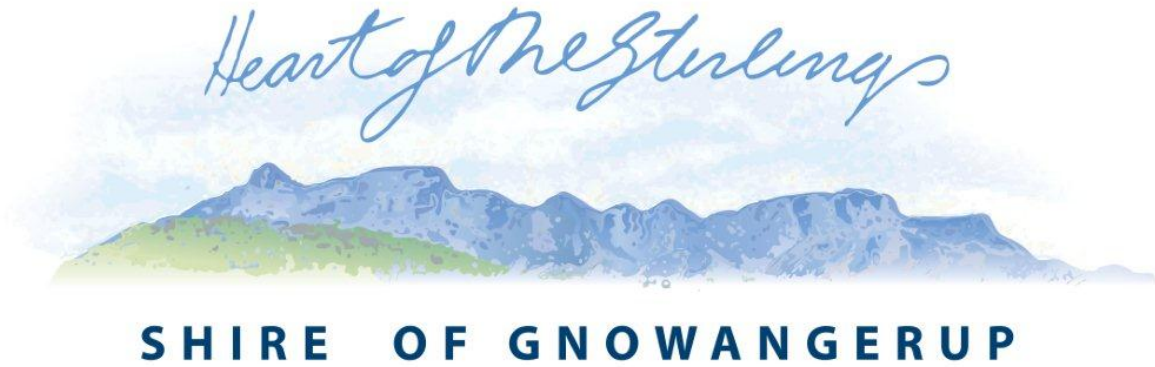
Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

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

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.



Submission to the Federal Government Mobile Coverage Programme

The Shire of Gnowangerup, population 1271 (Census 2011), covers a vast 5000 square kilometres, encompassing over 100 000 hectares of predominantly agricultural land.

Encompassing three towns within its district, mobile phone coverage is almost non-existent in one of these towns and patchy across transport and tourism routes radiating out from the other two.

While many rural local government bodies have in recent times been subject to declining populations this Shire is actively addressing this trend and as a result the population within the town of Gnowangerup is increasing. In addition the Shire plays host to a number of manufacturing and service businesses with turn-over in excess of \$10 million each. However a reliable mobile phone network across the entire shire is imperative to keeping and enticing residents and encouraging viable business and infrastructure opportunities.

With a large number of the population involved in agricultural pursuits negligible or patchy mobile phone reception leaves a workforce, many of whom work in isolated and often solitary pursuits, subject to further delay in the event of an accident, bushfire or other emergency.

Emergency service volunteers across the Shire do a first rate job providing these services to our district but are regularly hampered by poor mobile phone communication. This is no more evident than in the town of Borden where volunteers are unable to receive emergency call out's due to the lack of mobile phone coverage. Coordinating volunteers to a call out once they arrive at the ambulance or fire truck housed in Borden is also hampered by an inability to communicate via mobile phone.

While Borden is the Shire's smallest town it houses a large grain handling facility owned by Cooperative Bulk Handling, Western Australia's grain handling operator. In the 2013/2014 harvest season the Borden CBH Primary Receiving Site received a massive 289,878 tonnes of grower grain deliveries in 6062 truck loads. Farmers and transporters in the district have embraced many forms of modern technology and run large businesses reliant on communication particularly during the peak harvest delivery period. With no mobile coverage in Borden truck drivers are unable to communicate with the farmers whose loads they are delivering to make critical marketing decisions with regards to their grain deliveries. On a regular basis this leads to the unsafe practice of truckies climbing onto their cab roofs in order to try and achieve a mobile phone signal.

Further to this there are still many agricultural businesses across the Shire who reside in mobile phone black spots and are therefore not only unable to access reliable mobile phone coverage but also fast and dependable internet access hampering banking, bill paying, grain marketing, employer recruitment etc. In this era of rapid technological advancement it seems unacceptable that rural businesses are faced with poor mobile and internet coverage, potentially putting them one step behind their competitors.

This Shire is also supportive of growth in the tourism sector with a number of tourism businesses, including accommodation providers, establishing themselves in recent years. Many of these businesses face the same issues of mobile phone and internet coverage as described above often with an adverse effect on their competitive edge with regards to on-line bookings, marketing etc.

And with the magnificent Stirling Ranges found within the southern boundary of the Shire many tourists travel through, particularly during wildflower season in the spring. They also complain regularly to the Shire and tourism accommodation providers about the lack of reliable mobile phone coverage preventing them from staying in the area for a longer period as they are unable to stay in touch with home etc.

Mobile phone black spots are not a new issue for this Shire. The Shire has been active in pursuing options for better mobile phone coverage across the Shire but in recent times particularly for the Borden town site. Discussions have been held with Telstra and the Great Southern Development Commission with regards to providing a mobile phone tower in Borden, however at a cost of more than \$200 000 to Council to do so this is not a viable option.

Similarly the Shire has had ongoing discussions with the State Department of Commerce and Cooperative Bulk Handling in an effort to progress funding options.

However it must be said that telecommunications for **all** Australians, rural, remote and metropolitan remains the responsibility of the Federal Government. This Shire is in no position to fund a telecommunications tower to resolve the lack of mobile phone coverage in the Borden town site and nor should we be expected to fund Federal Government infrastructure that we firmly believe **all** Australians should have access to.

Ms. Shelley Pike



Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Gnowangerup

