

*Regional Telecommunications  
Independent Review Committee  
PO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2601*

*04 August 2018*

Dear Secretariat

**Re: Regional Telecommunications Review 2018**

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the review of the telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia. I have previously provided correspondence to Hon. Darren Chester, Federal Member for Gippsland and Tim Bull Local Member for Gippsland, regarding the equity and availability of internet data for regional communities. I have attached a copy for your information and to further support my submission and Mr Chester made representation on my behalf to the Minister for Rural Telecommunications, Senator the Hon Bridget Mackenzie.

I believe the main barriers in regional communities in terms of people increasing their use of digital technologies, is the availability and affordability of reliable internet networks and more importantly data allowances. For example, we are located 6 mins east of Nowa Nowa and are unable to access the fixed wireless NBN network there, or any network for that matter which offers unlimited data. The most affordable option available to us is the NBN Skymuster satellite program which only offers a maximum of 250GB (60GB peak and 190GB off peak) for \$64.99/ month. It is unacceptable that we have to pay approximately \$380/mth for phone, and 365GB of data, when this can be bundled at a much cheaper rate with unlimited data in other areas (6mins away).

With four school aged children and a farming business it is not a surprise that we exceed our peak data allowance almost monthly. Whilst we have a higher amount which can be accessed 'off peak' I am reluctant to allow the children to access the internet at this time for a number of reasons. Firstly, I believe internet use during the hours of 1 -7am could potentially increase the risk of exposure with unsavoury people, secondly I do not allow my children to have unsupervised internet access and let's face it with four children, a family farming business, afterschool activities etc I need some sleep at some stage! On a more personal note, we are currently struggling with the huge stresses of the drought and having to constantly monitor and restrict data use to ensure we don't incur further charges is something I would rather not have to deal with.

A possible solution to this barrier would be to provide regional areas with more opportunity to access unlimited data allowances at higher broadband speeds. By providing a financial subsidy to the regional areas so that internet providers can offer better data packages at a cost that is affordable to the average family can assist in

reducing the inequity of the current standards. I am deeply annoyed with the fact that we, in regional areas are expected to pay a higher price for an inferior service.

I do have a reasonably reliable 4G network provided through Telstra, however the cost of data on these devices is significantly higher than what is offered via fixed wireless. Across our 5 mobile devices (115GB data allowance) it costs \$268.20/month. I do not understand why the Sky Muster network can only offer maximum data packages of 250GB, with the majority of the data allowance during the "off peak" period, or why the 4G wireless network cannot provide an affordable unlimited data option, when some networks can provide unlimited data for well under \$100/month.

We predominantly use our broadband service to further support our children's educational needs and requirements, as well as accessing our Accounting program, Email, Website development, Social media and keeping abreast with current changes and developments within our industry. Unfortunately, when I have tried to access our Accounting program via the satellite it has been very slow and inefficient, leaving us no option than to revert to the 4G network service.

Improved availability and affordability of broadband services would hugely benefit my family and business as we would have better access to services and programs we are currently not engaging in as we simply do not have the data availability.

The educational sector is producing a number of highly valuable learning support programs which schools are encouraging students to access and use when they are at home, however, these programs require a significant amount of data and unfortunately we are grossly disadvantaged as I have to constantly monitor our data usage to ensure we do not exceed our monthly allowance.

The agricultural industry is also investing a significant amount time and money into the development and implementation of a number of digital web based programs, which will enable farmers to improve their management and compliance with quality assurance and product traceability. If we had access to more reliable and affordable broadband services we would definitely access these programs and services.

We really appreciate the 'committee' taking the time to review the Telecommunications Services and believe that in our situation our major concerns is the inequity of data allowance and availability. The service provided by the 4G network is relatively reliable and substantially better than the Sky muster Satellite, however it is not a viable financial option and it still does not provide an unlimited data option.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you require further information or would like to discuss this matter further I would be happy to assist.

Yours Sincerely

*Katie Zagami*

Katie Zagami  
e. [matt@avagrowfarms.com.au](mailto:matt@avagrowfarms.com.au)

att. Copy of Correspondence to The Hon. Darren Chester MP

COPY OF CORRESPONDENCE

*Katie and Matt Zagami*

WAIREWA VIC 3887

*The Hon. Darren Chester MP  
PO Box 486  
SALE VIC 3853*

*17 July 2018*

Dear Mr Chester

**Re: Disadvantage of Rural Students- Equality and Availability of Internet Data Allowance**

Thank you for taking the time to consider this correspondence. I am writing to express my concern regarding the gross disadvantage my children are facing with their education as a direct result of the inequity of NBN networks and subsequent Internet data allowances.

We are located just east of Nowa Nowa, in Wairewa, whilst only 6 minutes from Nowa Nowa, we are unable to access the fixed wireless NBN network available there. We do however have access to the NBN Satellite, which we have connected to.

As you can appreciate with four school age children, one with a diagnosed Specific Learning Disorder (Dyslexia) it is essential to ensure they have adequate access to educational programs, so as to not cause any further disadvantage to them. The internet has a fantastic education base and has a number of online programs designed to assist children's educational needs. We have in the past paid memberships to Literacy and Mathematical programs such as Reading Eggs and Mathletics, however I had to restrict and ultimately cancel these memberships as we simply could not afford the cost of Internet Data to support these programs.

The children's schools both set tasks and encourage children to continue to access these programs at home to further support classroom learning. Charlotte's Speech Pathologist and Private Tutor also insists she has access to these online programs at home, as such we begrudgingly signed to the NBN Satellite network.

The NBN Satellite, does provide a vastly cheaper option than our previous 4G Telstra Mobile network connection, however it is significantly slower and has a tendency to lose connection regularly. I strongly believe the inequity of the Internet Data Plans across regional Victoria is disgraceful. We have been paying \$55/month for 9.5GB of data and \$35/month for 5.5GB of data on the Telstra 4G mobile network (only network service reliable in our area), and an extra \$10 for every 1GB over our limit. Our NBN Satellite plan is \$63.73/month for 60GB Peak and 190GB Off Peak (1am-7am).

Due to the limited amount of data available on the 4G network, we constantly exceeded our data allowance resulting in at times \$50/month extra – this was simply unaffordable and unacceptable.

Not only are our children disadvantaged, we as small business owners are also disadvantaged. In today's current society almost everything essential to running a successful business is Internet based requiring significant Data usage. We rely on the Internet for not only our Accounting Program, Emails, Website, but also our Quality Assurance Compliance and to keep up to date and relevant with the industry.

How many times a day do you access the internet or utilise internet data to fulfil the requirements of your work? Are you constantly checking your data allowance or neglecting to complete a task to ensure you do not exceed your data allowance? This is a constant issue I am faced with daily.

I am requesting that the Government step in and ensure equality across all NBN services, so rural families are not disadvantaged. I believe rural communities should have access to unlimited data, as the current maximum data package of 60GB (easily accessible data) is ridiculously insufficient. The other alternative in our situation is for the Government to expand the fixed wireless NBN network to Wairewa, Victoria.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you require further information or would like to discuss this matter further I would be happy to assist.

Yours Sincerely

*Katie Zagami*

Katie Zagami  
e. [matt@avagrowfarms.com.au](mailto:matt@avagrowfarms.com.au)

CC. Tim Bull Member for Gippsland East