To Whom it May Concern

**2018 Regional Telecommunications Review**

Burke Shire Council is a local government authority in North West Queensland. The Shire has a population of ~500 people and has two townships: Burketown and Gregory. Burketown is serviced by fibre, acquiring funding for this fibre connectivity through the National Stronger Regions Fund (Cth) and the Building Our Regions Fund (State of Qld). Gregory is serviced by Sky Muster satellite and a 4G mobile phone base station (courtesy of the Mobile Black Spot Programme). The balance of the Shire is made up of beef cattle properties, mining and remote tourism outposts. Pastoralists and non-town based tourism businesses are on the Sky Muster satellite.

Burke appreciates the opportunity to submit a response to the Regional Telecommunications Review (2018). Please see Council's responses below:

1. What are the main barriers to people in regional communities increasing their use of digital technologies and possible solutions for overcoming these barriers?
   - Data
     o Data restricted internet plans for those serviced by the Sky Muster satellites continue to present issues for rural residents in the Burke Shire. These plans limit the range of digital services that can be accessed (no cloud-based services, no streaming, no gaming) and the functionality of those services that are already accessed (e.g. it is possible to read emails, but users often elect not to download image/video/attached files to save on data).
   - Latency issues
     o Those on satellite services also face issues with latency, which makes use of digital technologies frustrating and actively precludes the effective use of a range of services (e.g. video-conferencing).

2. How are people in regional communities currently using their broadband service and how might they increase the benefits of using this technology?
   - Current usage (Council and government service providers: health, education, police):
     o In Burketown, a number of government service providers have access to a Telstra GWIP service, which enables more effective use of data symmetrical activities (e.g. telehealth, video-conferencing etc.). This is possible by virtue of Council securing $4m in competitive grant funding to install a fibre path between Doomadgee and Burketown.
       ▪ Securing this funding was essential to ensure that the township did not have to rely on NBN satellite services.
     o The Burke Shire Council is 'in the cloud', with managed services provided by Civica. This allows staff, consultants, auditors to work remotely while still having access to Burke's systems.
   - Current usage (businesses):
     o A number of businesses are disappointed with their inability to make the most of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) installations that took place as part of the Doomadgee to Burketown Fibre Optic Project (installation of fibre path between Burketown and Doomadgee). Telstra costs for accessing FTTP services are prohibitively high.

- Increased benefits of usage:
  - o Education: residents in remote/regional townships serviced by fibre connectivity would do well to explore online education opportunities.
  - o Businesses: businesses, particularly those in the tourism sector, need to embrace digital transformation. At present, very few businesses are effective in developing and managing a digital presence. Future work needs to be done to assist businesses to develop online booking and transaction systems, to utilise social media platforms and engage with other key digital platforms (TripAdvisor, WikiCamps etc.).

3. What data-intensive activities are occurring in regional, rural and remote Australia? What digital technologies are needed for these?
   - In Burketown: cloud computing, tele-health services etc. are being used in Burketown. Fibre connectivity is required.
   - In Gregory: no data intensive activities take place as Gregory is serviced by Sky Muster.
   - Balance of Shire: none, bot possible on satellite;

4. How can regional businesses better utilise digital technologies to maximise economic benefits?
   - Businesses in the Gulf Savannah region (Carpentaria SLA2 and Croydon/Etheridge SLA2) need to embrace a range of digital transformation initiatives. Most importantly, businesses need to develop their own websites, develop a digital presence on social media and other relevant digital platforms: TripAdvisor, Instagram, WikiCamps etc. Businesses also need to embrace online booking and transactions capability and focus on data collation and analysis.

5. What can be done to improve access to and uptake of telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities?
   - Not answered.

6. Are there practical examples of how communications services can improve the well-being of people in remote Indigenous communities?
   - Not answered

7. What skills do people need to get the most from their digital technologies, and where can they learn these skills?
   - Understanding the digital network:
     - o From Council's perspective, it is crucial that we are aware of the capabilities of existing digital networks and seek to optimise our use of these networks. This can be a tricky proposition for remote/regional Councils that do not have the benefit of in-house IT specialists. In practice, we find reliable information difficult to access both for ourselves and on behalf of local businesses and residents.
     - o Council assumes that this difficulty extends to regional/remote businesses and residents as well.
   - Understanding digital applications:
     - o Once the network is understood, Council needs to ensure its software/IT services empower staff to deliver value to the community. Given the extravagance of choice available and the rapidly changing terrain in the way software services are delivered, selecting the right solution is, again, a tricky proposition.

8. Have you had ongoing issues affecting your satellite or fixed wireless broadband service? If so, how have you overcome these?
   - Council has experienced ongoing issues with speed, latency, data restrictions in relation to its satellite service in the township of Gregory.
   - These issues cannot be overcome as they are part and parcel of having a satellite service.

9. If you are in an area with access to the Sky Muster satellite service and you have not taken it up, why not?
   - Council has taken up the Sky Muster service in the township of Gregory. Council would consider opportunities to exit the service if a reasonable 4G alternative could be accessed.

10. What economic or social indicators could be used to guide investment to further improve mobile coverage?
    - The social indicator of "exclusion" from a service and the socio-economic costs of this exclusion are worth referencing in making investment decisions. For example, take two proximate towns, one serviced by fibre and one serviced by satellite. The fibre-serviced town will have access to tele-health, for example, the other may not. Lack of access to this service is likely to have a range of health/economic outcomes (accessing health cheaper vs. more expensive; accessing health services more frequently vs. less frequently; accessing health interventions earlier rather than later).

11. Is information readily available regarding how to use devices to improve mobile reception in areas with poor

coverage? E.g. information about external antenna equipment?
- No answer provided.
12. What emerging digital services will be of most benefit to regional businesses and what are the data needs of these services?
- Current digital services: it remains extremely difficult for many of our rural residents/businesses to utilise email, EFTPOS, Software-as-a-Service products, video-conferencing, streaming services and so on. It is crucial that these deficiencies continue to attract our focus in rural/remote areas.
13. What broadband services are people using other than those available through the NBN?
- No answer provided.
14. How can more competition be encouraged in the provision of broadband services in regional Australia?
- No answer provided.
15. Anything else to raise?
- Council supports continued funding for the Mobile Black Spots Programme;
- Council supports continued funding for digital projects through the Building Better Regions Fund (Cth) and counterpart programs delivered through State Governments.

Kind regards,
Phil

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