3 August 2018

2018 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat Department of Communications and the Arts GPO Box 2154 CANBERRA ACT 2601

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To the Review Secretariat

Submission into the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review

Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Ltd (CPAQ) appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the current Regional Telecommunications Review and to highlight some of the challenges faced by caravan parks operating their businesses in regional and remote areas of Queensland.

Reliable and accessible telecommunications can make a significant difference to a small business, particularly for one in a regional or remote area. This access can increase productivity, allow access to upskilling opportunities that distance may otherwise prevent, increase awareness of a region, allow businesses to implement new technology and can encourage innovation. Further telecommunications can cause both positive and negative guest feedback, potential impacting both the reputation of the business and the region.

For these reasons our members have a significant interest in the review and have actively provided our association with their thoughts and comments on the issue paper provided.

Recommendations

1. Pricing adjustments for poor coverage

Where a service like NBN or Broadband is unreliable or unavailable businesses should be able to access an alternate service (4G, 5G, satellite) at the same cost that businesses in metropolitan and major regional centres are charged for the use of NBN or Broadband.

2. Plain English information

To allow businesses to make sound decisions in relation to telecommunications there needs to be more "plain English" information on the services available, their coverage and the pitfalls of these services.

This includes accurate information about what speeds will be available on each NBN plan and how these compare to previously used ADSL, Broadband or mobile data plans. Further most businesses do not have the technical expertise to understand which infrastructure will assist them, particularly where their business is within a current black-spot.



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• Caravan Industry Association of Australia

Queensland Tourism Industry Council

3. Increased Digital Television Coverage

In locations where digital television is unavailable our member parks note increased frustration by guests when they are also unable to use a reliable internet connection to stream television, movies and sport. Digital television should be available to all areas of Australia, alternatively grants or incentives should be made available so that businesses and/or that do not currently have access to digital television can look at developing the necessary infrastructure for these services.

4. Educational Opportunities

Education and professional development for employees of businesses in remote and regional communities are limited due to the distance that they need to travel to attend these courses. Incentives should be considered to provide quality distance education options for these businesses.

Further online resources should be made available to assist businesses in better engaging with technology and what options are available to them.

Background

Telecommunications is an important issue for our member businesses, with those in regional and remote Queensland finding they are impacted far more than those in metropolitan areas such as Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast.

In a recent survey of our members (focusing on those businesses outside of Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast), 55% of respondents indicated that mobile and internet coverage in their region has stayed the same as it was three years ago however of the remaining 45% of respondents half indicated it had gotten worse with the other half reporting an improvement.

The region the business is located in played a significant role in the improvement or decline of their service in the last three years with businesses located in major regional centres largely reporting an improvement as shown in figure 1 below.

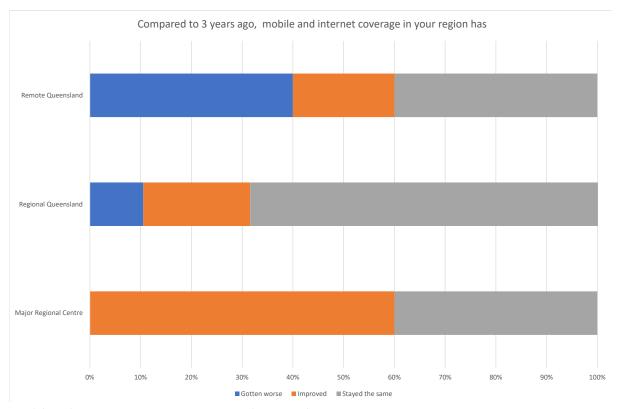


Figure 1: Mobile and internet coverage improvement in three years by region type

Those businesses that reported improved coverage indicated that this is due to the installation of new Telstra towers, the NBN going live in their region, or as a result of a small cell service from both Optus and Telstra this year.

Where the mobile and internet coverage had remained the same a number of comments were provided which indicate that there are still areas of Queensland that have no mobile or internet coverage, or that suffer from frequent drop outs which are worse in peak periods. In some regions it was noted there is only mobile phone service from one provider. One of the businesses that indicated their internet and mobile coverage had remained the same stated:

"We have put a phone booster in which is connected to 4 Yaggi ariels just so our staff have mobile service for personal use and since the internet wasn't consistent enough for our business to operate we had to turn to satellite."

From those businesses that reported their mobile and internet coverage had gotten worse in the last three years they advised that they had outgrown their current service (either as a business or a town) and had received a refusal from their provider to upgrade the service as "NBN is coming" or because their region is remote. Some of these businesses also noted recent mobile outages and unreliable internet services causing challenges for their business.

For businesses in highly popular but exceptionally seasonal regions such as Cape York it was noted that the annual influx of visitors along with outdated services mean that telecommunications struggle with the load during their peak season.

"Mobile coverage is basically the same, but the internet coverage is terrible. I can see the exchange from my business however it is so congested that we don't have ports available and the internet slows right down when kids finish school and jump online.

I pay the same money for a service that is worse now than ever before.

Our service provider won't upgrade it because 'NBN is coming' however, I'm not convinced that the NBN will be any better."

We asked survey respondents about the mobile phone coverage in their area to determine the quality of their service.

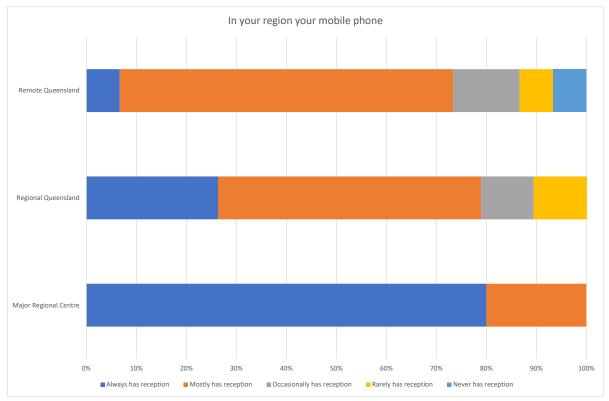


Figure 2: Mobile phone reception by region type

Only 25% of respondents indicated they always had mobile phone reception, with a further 50% of respondents indicated they mostly have mobile phone reception.

Of the remaining 25% of respondents, 20% only occasionally having mobile phone reception and 5% of respondents never having mobile phone reception.

This data was also impacted by where the business was located with none of the respondents that indicated they occasionally, rarely or never have reception coming from a metropolitan area and major regional centre as shown in figure 2.

37.5% of caravan parks that responded to the survey use an ADSL connection as their primary internet connection, with 47.5% using the NBN and 15% use the Sky Muster Satellite Service.

There were significant regional discrepancies with the responses received to this question with a much high take up of the NBN in major regional centres than in regional and remote Queensland as shown in figure 3 below.

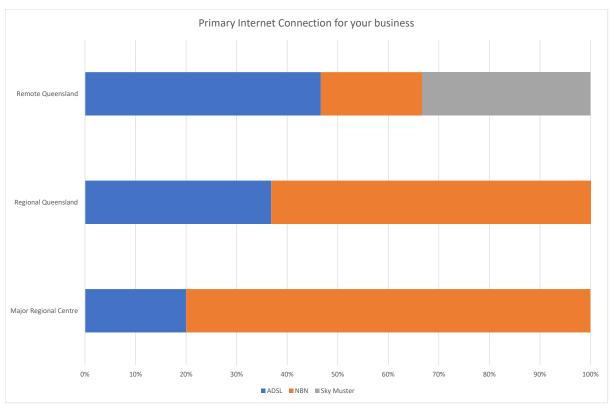


Figure 3: Primary internet connection type by region type

When asked about the quality of their internet connection over 80% of respondents in all areas (major regional centre, regional or remote) indicated their connection mostly or always works well.

For those in major regional centres the remaining 20% of respondents indicated that their internet connection occasionally works well.

When looking at businesses in regional and remote areas the consistency of their coverage reduces with 5% of responding businesses in regional areas reporting they only sometimes have coverage and a further 5% indicating they never have coverage.

While 80% of responding remote businesses indicated their internet mostly works well, the remaining 20% indicated in only sometimes works as seen in Figure 4 below. It is important to note that NO respondents in remote Queensland believe their internet 'always works well'.

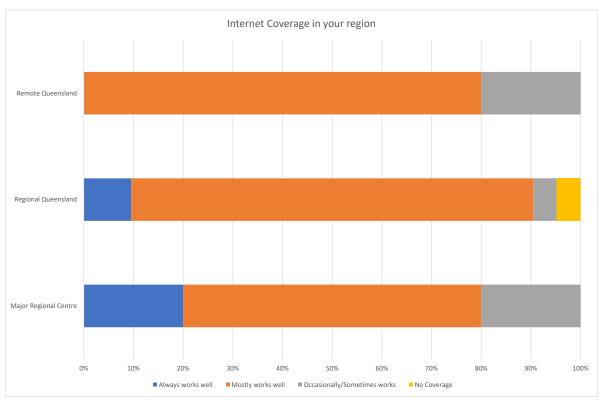


Figure 4: Internet coverage by region type

Mobile and internet coverage has also had an impact on most Queensland caravan parks. We asked the caravan parks we surveyed to let us know the impact the mobile and internet coverage in their region has had on their businesses over the past three years. Like all the questions we asked there was significant variation based on the location of the business as seen in Figure 5 below.

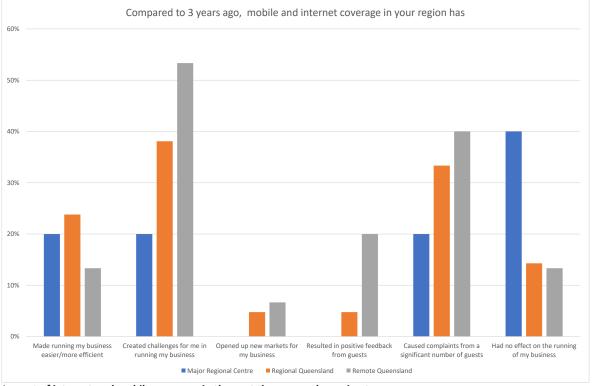


Figure 5: Impact of internet and mobile coverage in the past three years by region type

Over the past three years over 20% of respondents to our survey, regardless of their region, indicated that mobile and internet has created challenges for them in the running of their business.

When looking at regional businesses this increased to 37% and for remote businesses to over 50%. One of the caravan parks advised that internet and mobile coverage in their region created challenges for their business including:

"Congestion on 3G network, no eftpos when mobile down, almost impossible to run cloud-based software"

While there have been positive impacts for some businesses, including the opening of new markets, the negative feedback was far more significant with negative feedback from guests and significant challenges noted by many businesses. One caravan park noted that:

"We go to great expense in providing free Wi-Fi and roaming Wi-Fi. The slow speed and intermittent service always angers guests."

For parks in remote Australia with access to the Sky Muster Satellite the feedback was far more positive than those using ADSL or NBN services.

"Installation of the NBN Sky Muster Satellite Internet Service has improved internet services which has improved aspects of the businesses operations."

Responses to questions asked in the Issues Paper

Please note only answers to relevant questions have been included below, question 5 has been skipped.

1. What are the main barriers to people in regional communities increasing their use of digital technologies and possible solutions for overcoming these barriers?

Coverage and reception along with the speed of their services remains the greatest barrier for caravan parks in regional communities. Coverage and reception was less of an issue for caravan parks in major regional centres with their concerns more in relation to the speed of the service and reliability. For caravan parks in remote areas coverage and reception, along with reliability were the key concerns.

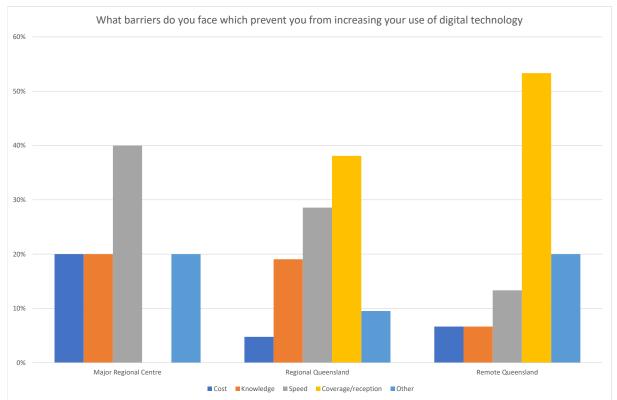


Figure 6: Barriers preventing regional caravan parks from increasing their use of digital technology

When asked if there were any 'Other' barriers respondents indicated that reliability was an issue as they need a reliable service in order to move some of their businesses critical systems online.

2. How are people in regional communities currently using their broadband service and how might they increase the benefits of using this technology?

Our member caravan parks have a range of services available to them now that allow them to increase guest nights, improve productivity, ensure compliance and increase their economic contribution to their region. Where they have not got access to reliable internet services most of these businesses will either choose not to take up these cloud or web based services, or will not be able to effectively implement them in their businesses.

Poor internet connections can also impact the guest experience with many caravan parks wishing to offer Wi-Fi for guests who may otherwise not be able to access the internet, or in some cases where there is no television coverage. One caravan park noted:

"We have a Wi-Fi network in the park for our guests. I paid close to \$20,000 for the most modern, fast, service for my guests, but the Telstra exchange can't get the speed to my premises so that my guests have good internet. They are always complaining that it's too slow. With 150 people online, Telstra can't meet the demand.

I can't get an unlimited plan out here. The biggest plan is 2000GB/month, I have to portion control the data for my guests at 4GB per person per week. Even then I'm concerned that we might go over the limit."

Caravan parks across the state need a reliable internet connection so they can:

- Use cloud based accounting software and communicate this information to their accountants and/or bookkeepers.
 - For businesses where the owner does not work in the business, or has multiple properties, this software allows them to understand how the business is performing without needing to be at the park.
- 2. Provide a guest service in the form of Wi-Fi. This is often used by guests for viewing television in regional/remote regions.

"I give free Wi-Fi to my guests this is the only way to keep them happy since there is no TV reception in the area"

Further as international travellers become more comfortable travelling Australia and venture in to regional and remote areas of Queensland park provided Wi-Fi allows them to keep friends and family back home abreast of their trip.

Quality Wi-Fi also allows guests to post images and updates of their adventures on social media which can increase the reputation and awareness of a regional community, increasing visitor numbers and providing an economic contribution to the community.

- On the reverse side, poor internet and / or mobile reception can create reputational damage to a region as guests leave negative reviews (often online) when they leave.
- 3. Using cloud based "live" reservation software this software allows parks to create bookings either over the phone, in person, or through a link with online booking services (such as booking.com) providing real time data on how many bookings they have at any time.
 - Not only does this ensure that they do not double book a site or cabin, it also allows offsite owners to track the performance of the business. Without a reliable internet connection one caravan park noted:

"We run our entire reservation system on the cloud and can be without internet regularly which cripples our business."

- 4. List rooms and sites on online booking services such as Booking.com, Expedia, and GoSeeAustralia, allowing these businesses to increase guest nights and increase awareness of their business.
- 5. Communicate with guests, suppliers, and staff using an email client like Outlook as well as through email marketing software (generally cloud based).
- 6. Use online ordering for goods and services needed for their businesses (often done outside of business hours as these businesses are often small businesses with onsite owners that do the admin work out of hours).
- 7. Use of cloud-based staff rostering and cloud-based register systems.
- 8. Use Internet based EFTPOS.
- 9. Ensure that their backups are completed regularly and kept offsite.
- 10. Undertake marketing activities including social media activity and to maintain their caravan park website.
- 11. Allow staff to undertake professional development activities like webinars and online training, particularly in regional or remote locations where the travel time to attend face to face training could exceed 8 hours.
- 12. Attend meetings by video and/or teleconference, this is particularly useful where travel times make attending a face to face meeting a challenge.
- 13. Allow guests Wi-Fi access to communicate (phone and video conversations with friends and family).
- 14. Contact emergency services in the event of an emergency or incident. This also extends to those travellers with health issues that need medical attention when they are outside of metropolitan or regional centres.

3. What data-intensive activities are occurring in regional, rural and remote Australia? What digital technologies are needed for these?

"This is just one of many examples and as I am typing this our phone lines are down for unexpected maintenance! The communications across the Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait Islands is already in desperate need of attention and if the appropriate steps are not taken to ensure sufficient services the communities, businesses and the tourism industry will continues to suffer tremendously."

Provision of Wi-Fi to guests

Many caravan parks (and other tourism businesses) now offer guests free Wi-Fi. This has become a service that guests expect rather than considering desirable. Where these businesses are located in areas with limited or no television reception guests also expect to be able to stream television, particularly sports.

"We supply Wi-Fi to customers. We have no digital TV service, so the customers would like to stream football etc."

For some of these businesses that do not have television reception it is not due to a significantly remote location. Digital television access should be available to all areas of Australia.

"We use Vast satellite box for out TV as there is no TV service available in Rubyvale"

Cloud based software and services

For tourism businesses most software is now cloud based. In order to use cloud-based software it is imperative that they have good, reliable internet service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year.

Without a consistent internet connection, they are unable to take new bookings, check guests in or check them out. They are also unable to use the maintenance and reporting features now available through these services.

The need for a quality internet connection also extends to telephone calls as more businesses migrate to a VoIP based telephone service which requires a consistent internet connection.

A reliable internet connection is a requirement across Australia for all businesses - where a service like NBN or Broadband is unreliable or unavailable businesses should be able to access an alternate service (4G, 5G, satellite) at the same cost that businesses in metropolitan and major regional centres are charged for the use of NBN or Broadband.

4. How can regional businesses better utilise digital technologies to maximise economic benefits?

For every dollar of received by a caravan park there is \$1.38 of economic activity generated in their local community alone. Improve connectivity and increased take up of digital technologies would allow these businesses to improve their productivity, increase digital marketing activities, attract more guests, increase their turnover and, as a result, continue to increase the economic contribution they make to their local community.

Cloud based software

By moving to cloud-based software solutions and providing guests access to online booking services they will be able to increase visitor numbers to regional and remote areas providing a significant economic benefit for the community.

Online booking sites also provide access to guests that they may not have otherwise been able to target. These sites often remove barriers that may exist for some travellers considering travelling to areas they haven't previously visited including regional and remote areas of Australia

"Local businesses are being negatively affected by poor internet and are then unable to diversify/take advantage of opportunities online."

Professional development opportunities

With quality internet connections businesses would have the ability to allow their staff to undertake a greater range of professional development opportunities, including access to webinars, teleconferences and video conferences. This would assist them in upskilling their staff, increasing retention and improving the customer experience.

Improved reputation

With an increase in online reviews, reliable digital technology would enable parks to respond in a timely manner to guests providing online reviews, improving the reputation of the area and increasing visitation.

For guests improved digital technologies and more coverage would see an increase in use of mobile mapping applications which could ease confusion in remote areas.

Open new markets

Reliable mobile phone and internet reception are critical for many travellers. Reliable and consistent mobile phone reception and internet reception would encourage corporate travellers and international travellers to stay for longer in areas of regional and remote Australia that do not have reliable coverage.

Further quality internet and mobile phone coverage may allow some individuals and families that are not required in the office all the time to relocate to a regional or remote town, increasing capability in that town and reducing the burden on infrastructure in major capital cities.

6. Are there practical examples of how communications services can improve the well-being of people in remote Indigenous communities?

Communications are necessary for the well being of individuals living in remote communities. Without consistent and reliable communication services an emergency that could have been relatively safely handled could easily get out of control. One caravan park noted:

"Only last week a grass fire burnt a service shed connected to the Bamaga Telstra Exchange and Communications Tower which serves as the main hub for all the Northern Peninsula Communities and connects the entire Torres Strait Islands. The Local Rural Fire Brigade had to use the limited mobile communications to contact the Fire Department on Horn Island and transport them via helicopter to the site to assist with containing the fire. Luckily the fire was managed and brought under control otherwise the consequences would of been catastrophic for the local businesses, communities and visiting tourists as this occurred during the busiest school holiday period all year."

Further communication services could be used to allow individuals living in remote communities to access services they would not otherwise be able to easily access such as attending a specialist appointment by video conference or education opportunities.

7. What skills do people need to get the most from their digital technologies, and where can they learn these skills?

Information on what services are available and how to determine if they are appropriate for the individual business is something which would add a significant benefit to businesses in regional and remote areas of Queensland. This also includes education about what satellite services are available and the difference between each option, some of our member caravan parks noted that cheapest is not always best.

For many businesses the speed that technology is changing can be overwhelming, as quickly as they implement one system a replacement one becomes available. For these businesses more information on how to operate and engage with technology and the many services available would be useful. This extends to ensuring education on how to use new technologies and software is easily available to individuals living in regional and remote areas.

"Due to isolation it is difficult to attend any services provided to improve skills, we cannot do webinars as our internet is too slow."

One of the large challenges for businesses in regional and remote areas relates to recruiting and retaining skilled staff, and this extends to include skilled IT staff/contractors. It is nearly impossible to get skilled IT staff/contractors in regional and remote areas both on a permanent and one-off issue basis.

Queensland caravan parks have noted it is necessary for their staff to be knowledgeable enough to assist guests with their internet issues, particularly in accessing the park internet on their own device.

8. Have you had ongoing issues affecting your satellite or fixed wireless broadband service? If so, how have you overcome these issues?

Over 47% if respondents advised that they have had ongoing internet issues, with this number increasing for caravan parks in remote areas.

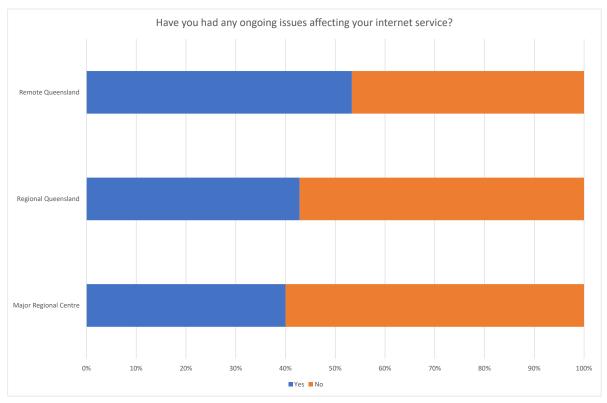


Figure 5: Ongoing internet service issues by region type

"Modem randomly drops out - loses coverage. We can do nothing except wait for it to come back. Using a web based reservation system this is very frustrating when serving customers."

Many businesses indicated they had spent a great deal of money on devices and infrastructure and they were still not satisfied with their internet service due to inconsistent speeds and intermittent service.

"It is a constant battle getting it resolved whenever something goes wrong, you can be days weeks without proper services"

When asked how they had overcome these issues their responses fell into three main categories:

i. Purchase of a second device - either a mobile phone on another network, a satellite system, a 3G/4G mobile internet device, and/or a Smart Antenna - many of these businesses advised that it had not resolved their issue and that they still had ongoing reliability issues

"We have two satellites and a 3G mobile data and a smart antenna to boost the reception"

Some of these businesses indicated they now used the internet connection from a 3G or 4G device for their essential cloud-based software (such as reservation management software, accounting software and online booking platforms) as they could not run their business without these services.

These businesses indicated they were having to pay excessive fees and charges for these services as well as providing inconsistent service for their guests.

"Switching to backup 3G/4G which is annoying, expensive and not a consistent service as well!"

- ii. By contacting the retailer/provider. Those businesses that indicated they had overcome their problem by contacting the retailer/provider also noted:
 - a. When contacting their retailer or provider the issue was often blamed on a third party (i.e. NBN blaming Telstra and Telstra blaming NBN).
 - b. They wasted a significant amount of time waiting on hold or in a queue when calling the call centre. Some respondents also indicated that the staff working at the call centre often have poor English which can make communication an issue.

"The NBN installation was botched. We spent hours and hour on the phone trying to get someone to help us."

c. It was not unusual for them to be charged a fee to fix the problem, and in some cases to even start to investigate the issue (regardless of fault):

"NBN upgraded the tower 500m away from me and disconnected me for 10 days without warning. NBN changed the coding in the tower which left me without service and then charged me a \$135.00 fee to fix the problem"

d. These businesses also reported extended wait periods for the issue to be resolved.

"It took 9 weeks to have a modem changed"

iii. Going to the Ombudsman or getting lawyers involved:

"When we were told we had to go to NBN we had all sorts of dramas actually getting it done properly. It took 3 months of toing and froing and several times in those 3 months we were without phones or internet. Twice for 3 days in a row with no one seeming to know what the problem was. The cost we estimate to be \$35,000. We have been offered \$5,000 compensation. We have now gotten lawyers involved."

9. If you are in an area with access to the Sky Muster satellite service and you have not taken it up, why not?

Six survey respondents indicated they are currently using the Sky Muster satellite service. Five of these businesses classified themselves as being in a remote area with one in a regional area.

There appeared to be very little knowledge of the Sky Muster Satellite service with other survey respondents however this may be because they are in a region that does not have access to this service.

10. What economic or social indicators could be used to guide investment to further improve mobile coverage?

There are a range of social and economic indicators that could be used to guide investment including growth in (or pure numbers of) residents, businesses, visitors.

"Telstra and limited Optus are the only mobile services available throughout Cape York as well as NBN Sky Muster Satellite Internet Services. The limited mobile services available are placed under massive strain during peak periods when large amounts of tourists visit the Cape York Peninsula."

Where a destination is impacted by seasonal tourism it is also important to ensure the infrastructure and services can cope when the region is running at 100% occupancy, not just during the quite periods.

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?

72% of respondents indicated they do not believe information is readily available on devices and methods to improve mobile reception in areas with poor coverage.

It was noted that the information that is available is hard to understand unless you are very technically minded or work in that sector.

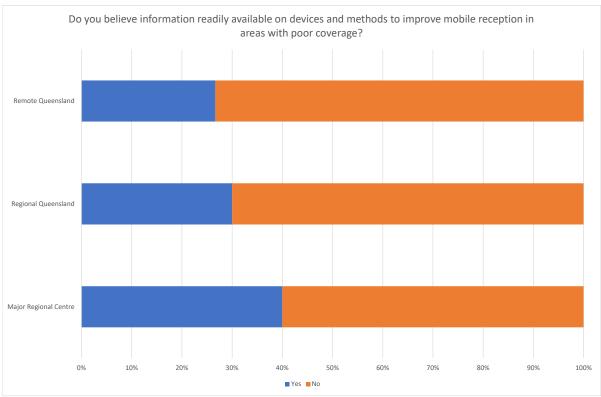


Figure 8: Is Information readily available on devices and methods to improve mobile reception in areas with poor coverage

12. What emerging digital services will be of most benefit to regional businesses and what are the data needs of these services?

As important as emerging digital services is improving the reliability and coverage of existing technologies. Until both mobile phone and internet services are reliable, consistent and cost effective many businesses in regional and remote areas are hesitant to implement new services.

13. What broadband services are people using other than those available through the NBN?

Caravan parks in Queensland indicated they use a mix of NBN, ADSL/Broadband, Sky Muster Satellite and 3G/4G mobile internet services.

"Because of all the problems we had with the NBN, we run our reservation computers with mobile data through an external antenna."

Further 48% of regional businesses and 40% of remote businesses have implemented technologies or methods to improve their mobile or internet coverage.

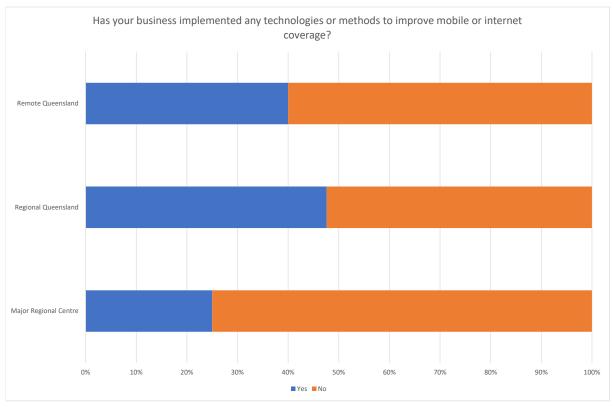


Figure 9: If technologies have been implemented to improve coverage by region type

The technologies/methods used by these businesses to improve their coverage included:

- a. Upgraded Wi-Fi system/situating devices higher for better reception
- b. Installation of boosters and/or smart antennas
- c. Telstra 3G aerial plus approved coverage repeater and multiple NBN Sky Muster Satellites
- d. Yaggi ariels

14. How can more competition be encouraged in the provision of broadband services in regional Australia?

An increased number of providers with a minimum level of coverage would provide more options for businesses in regional Australia. Currently many feel locked into Telstra even though they are not receiving the service they have been advised they will get.

"If any other company doesn't provide the minimum level of service that they say they are going to do we take them to the ACCC. Why is Telstra allowed to provide below minimum level of service and supply and still get away with it. Why should we be locked into paying for a contract when Telstra does not meet their minimum service obligation. If you can't do what you say you are going to do, then why should I pay the same price for a lower service!"

Finding a way to offset the inflated costs charged to businesses in regional and remote areas would also increase take up of services.

"Give businesses a break and give the same pricing you give to home users to businesses.

Our staff who live further away can get unlimited data for half the price we pay for 60G

of data."

About Us

There are over 10 million visitor nights in the caravan and camping sector in Queensland every year with 1 in 10 visitor nights to Queensland being in the sector. The industry is a significant economic contributor to regional Queensland with caravan parks in most towns right across Queensland.

Caravan Parks Association of Queensland Ltd (CPAQ) is the industry body representing caravan parks in Queensland. Established in 1966, the association is the voice for the caravan parks industry in Queensland, providing support, networking, professional development and promotional opportunities for our members.

There are currently over 420 full and associate members of CPAQ, made up of caravan parks, mixed use parks (i.e. catering for tourist and residents in caravans or manufactured homes), and campgrounds, large and small, from all corners of the State, industry suppliers, tourism businesses, plus regional and local tourism organisations. Included as Appendix A is a map showing the spread and location of full CPAQ Caravan Park Members

We seek to work closely with both state and local governments to balance the needs of the industry, consumers and all levels of Government. Further we actively strive to ensure not only that minimum standards within parks are met, but that over time these industry standards are in fact driven higher.

As the peak body for the sector we aim to:

- Foster and assist in the development of the caravan parks industry
- Encourage a high standard of quality service and ethics from caravan parks in Queensland
- Strongly advocate for a level playing field for all industry participants
- Promote Queensland Caravan Parks as the holiday destination of choice
- Work closely with State and Local Government for the benefit of our members and councils
- Provide support and advice to member businesses and distribute relevant information to ensure the smooth running of member businesses

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this submission further please contact Michelle Weston, General Manager, Caravan Parks Association of Queensland on 07 3862 1833 or by email to michelle@caravanqld.com.au.

Regards

Michelle Weston General Manager

Appendix A: Location of CPAQ Member Caravan Parks

