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RE: Digital Technology Hub Submission

Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast (RDALC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Digital Technology Hub and to respond to the questions in the consultation paper about the design of the hub.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. What other sources of information should be incorporated into the design of the Digital Tech Hub?

In addition to the organisations already listed (BIRRR, ACCAN, ACCC, RSPs & infrastructure providers e.g. NBN Co, Telstra, Optus, Vodafone etc.), other sources of information and links that could be incorporated into the design are;

- the Small Business Commissioner
- the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman
- *Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman*
- other business associations i.e. the Chamber of Commerce.

2. What other existing networks can be used to promote the Digital Tech Hub?

RDALC supports Digital Tech Hub promotion through existing networks i.e. Rural and Remote Communications Coalition and the RDA network. Other networks may include:

- business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce
- community service groups who provide assistance to the elderly i.e. Senior Citizens

3. What other social media presence is most relevant to regional consumers?

- Facebook
- Facebook Messenger
- Twitter
- LinkedIn

4. What 3 to 4 hour window would best suit a limited-hours phone service, if implemented?

During business hours; 10am – 2pm

5. For retail service providers: what kind of in-kind support can you provide for the Digital

N/A



An Australian Government Initiative



An Initiative of
Government
of South Australia



Limestone Coast
Local Government
Association

6. What other information would be most useful to help small and medium businesses to maximise the benefits of digital connectivity?

Information on the current apps available to SME's i.e.

- Point of Sale apps for retail businesses
- Internet of Things
- Finance, HR and marketing apps
- Telco apps
- Government apps i.e. ATO

7. What information would be most useful in assisting communities & councils to undertake local digital planning?

Information on the benefits of using digital channels such as websites, e-newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

8. What other information would be most useful in assisting communities to prepare for, and best use digital connectivity during disaster and emergency situations?

Information on the available peer-to-peer apps that utilise Wi-Fi and Bluetooth to enable mobile phone use without the need for a provider's network, and information on how to quickly communicate crucial messages utilising digital channels, and how to raise awareness in the community of the existence of these social media channels i.e.

- media campaigns
- community education campaign
- websites
- E-newsletters
- LinkedIn

9. What options are there to fund the operation of the Digital Tech Hub beyond its two year funding period, e.g. paid advertising?

Corporate support i.e. sponsorship

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

Further to the feedback provided in RDALC's response to questions, we note that the Digital Technology Hub proposal appears to be more of a human capital response, whereas the digital connectivity problems faced by the residents and businesses within the Limestone Coast region are predominantly infrastructure related.

RDALC recently completed two important pieces of work: (i) Infrastructure Audit (ii) Prospectus of Priorities which provide an up-to-date assessment of infrastructure within the Limestone Coast region and opportunities for economic growth. This work identified that issues relating to broadband, mobile black-spots and data coverage were impacting on the productivity and competitiveness of critical industries including forestry and agriculture. With existing infrastructure, investment in new digital and data technologies that can enhance productivity and improve competitiveness in global markets is significantly reduced.

Examples of the ongoing impact on business and residents in the region include:

- Penola and Coonawarra businesses are increasingly frustrated and continue to be impacted with slow internet under the NBN, with businesses reporting intermittent internet connections and dropouts, particularly with EFTPOS machines, affecting businesses trade and ability to communicate.
- The Wattle Range Council's past two monthly council meetings have heard complaints from the floor about the unsatisfactory NBN coverage at the Union Dairy Company at Penola and the wider Glencoe district. Residents in the council area experience dropouts of service and slow internet speeds are prevalent, with some residents who can only access the NBN via Sky Muster Satellite allocated low gigabyte downloads with time restrictions, meaning the best access time is 1am-7am. This has resulted in unanimous support being received at the January monthly Wattle Range Council meeting for a protest motion from Council to be sent to the Australian Local Government Association.

- The Barn and Glenburnie Saleyards, two major commerce hubs in the Grant District Council area, have been significantly impacted by the lack of mobile phone coverage in their region. Upwards of 70,000 people visit The Barn every year, and the Glenburnie Saleyards are a multimillion-dollar livestock centre. The lack of mobile coverage has significant impact their trade.
- The forestry industry is experiencing significant challenges to collecting and processing real time data. Mobile blackspots around forestry plantations create issues in obtaining real time data during thinning and harvesting operations. Work needs to occur around how this lack of data connectivity can be overcome to support the industry to utilise the resource to its greatest economic benefit.

Connecting regional areas to the rest of world remains a critical challenge requiring investment in the next five years. As key industries, such as Agriculture and Forestry, become more data and technology driven, connectivity becomes essential in ensuring regions can compete in a global market. As businesses are driven to collect, utilise and provide more real time data the infrastructure that underpins this needs to be there to support and enable it. Currently large areas, particularly in less populated areas lack any digital connectivity. Due to the low populations in these areas they are not competitive for traditional mobile black spot towers. They likely need solutions such as networks of LoRa Gateways. IOT and Big Data trials would also be a key first step to build capacity in regions around the opportunities and to really bring regions into alignment with where real time data usage sits in other metropolitan centres and other countries.

Whilst RDALC acknowledges that the roll out of the NBN has addressed some connectivity issues within the region, we request it be noted that local businesses and residents still face issues with access, which will make it difficult for them to access an online Digital Technology Hub if the infrastructure that allows them to do so is not there.

Yours sincerely



David Wheaton
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER