

East Arnhem Regional Economic Development Committee

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30 July 2018

2018 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat
Department of Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601
secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

Dear Secretariat,

The East Arnhem Regional Economic Development Committee (REDC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. The REDC acknowledges the Australian Government's 23 February 2016 statement in response to the 2015 Regional Telecommunications Review however, we do not consider that equitable and measurable improvements have been made to telecommunications services in the East Arnhem regional centres, communities and homelands over the past three years.

We call on the Australian Government to:

- Actively engage with the REDC, regional communities, leaders and other stakeholders to plan and implement flexible telecommunications solutions which respond to user and customer demand and usage, business and industry growth needs and provide equitable and affordable solutions;
- Address the inequity of the telecommunications arrangements on the Gove Peninsula by ensuring at a minimum a Fixed Wireless broadband solution is provided to Gunyangara, Yirrkala and Gapuwiyak;
- Urgently provide a more robust, suitable and practical remote telecommunication solution for the homelands in this region; and
- Ensure the region's backbone and backhaul capacities to north East Arnhem and Groote Eylandt are upgraded to accommodate industry and consumer growth to support the growing tourism, aerospace, resource sector and resident needs.

East Arnhem Land is a remote area located in the North East of the Northern Territory covering around 33,000 square km. It has a population of approximately 15,000 people, and 70% of this population are Aboriginal. There are 11 communities and towns in the region, 6 of these are island based and there are over 70 permanently occupied Homelands. Nhulunbuy is the fast growing economic and services hub of the region, which is about 1000km from Darwin via a mainly unsealed and seasonal road. The region is home to the Yolngu and Anindilyakwa nations who have an unbroken connection to their land language, culture and lore.

Whilst the region has significant cultural and natural assets, and is prospective for business and industry growth to meet the long term need for job and employment in the region, there are significant challenges to overcome in health, education, community safety and wellbeing. Strong telecommunication services have a key role to play in supporting these communities and services, particularly given this region's isolation.

Telecommunications to Support Industry Growth

The outlook for the regional economy remains positive with spending in key government services remaining steady with demand likely to increase with population growth and significant infrastructure and housing investment over the coming ten years. The tourism, services and fisheries sectors continue to expand and there is high prospectively in the aerospace, resources and energy sectors. In the short term, the \$20million East Arnhem

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Flexible Aged Care Facility and \$100million Arnhem Space Centre will continue to drive growth however adequate telecommunications capacity is critical to their success.

Advice from Telstra is that backhaul or backbone capacity to North East Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt is reaching its limits and upgrades to the huts and exchange points is necessary to accommodate new industry with higher bandwidth requirements. Major space industry providers are exploring the benefits of North East Arnhem however their data needs cannot be met on existing regional systems. This region has a comparative advantage for the growing Australian and international space economy however addressing the data capacities is critical for industry to settle here.

Regional Telecommunications Inequities

Residents and businesses of the township of Nhulunbuy were recently provisioned high quality fixed broadband services through the NBN however, the two near Aboriginal communities of Yirrkala and Gunyangara, within a 12km radius of Nhulunbuy and close proximity to the same optic fibre networks, have to access NBN broadband services via the Sky Muster satellite service despite. Whilst the REDC recognises our region is vast, and many remote communities may have significant challenges in terms of broadband rollout, but it is important to ensure the digital divide is not exacerbated by the regional implementation of telecommunications solutions. Given the proximity of fibre, the REDC calls on the Australian Government to ensure the communities of Yirrkala, Gunyangara and Gapuwiyak are provided fixed wireless type service to provide more affordable and competitive solutions for residents.

Within the East Arnhem region, there are many Homelands with permanent populations above 30 people where the most basic of telecommunication services are provided. Whilst the universal service obligation (USO) and other Australian Government programs ensure that basic telephone services, payphones and prescribed carriage services are accessible, these services are unreliable, dated in terms of technology and do not provide data services. Many of these homelands are striving to grow local businesses through partnerships with tourism and other businesses however they are hampered by the lack of telecommunications services and accessibility. The REDC advocates strongly for a better solution for these Homelands than currently provided via the USO.

The REDC acknowledges that Remote Aboriginal communities are some of the most disadvantaged in the nation. The REDC asks for the Australian Government to commit and action the opportunity to promote not only new and emerging Aboriginal employment and business enterprises, but to also improve communications infrastructure to support the inevitable growing need for more capacity to our region, and capacity to support a prosperous future. Fit for purpose ICT will improve the living standards of remote NT residents and enable remote NT businesses to compete and thrive.

[REDACTED]

Warm regards

Klaus Helms
Chair, East Arnhem Regional Economic Development Committee
CEO Gumatj Corporation

The REDC consists of senior representatives of Developing East Arnhem Limited, Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, Gumatj Aboriginal Corporation, Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation, East Arnhem Regional Council, East Arnhem Land Tourism Association, Nhulunbuy Corporation Limited, Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, Regional Development Australia NT, ARDS Aboriginal Corporation, Rio Tinto, and East Arnhem Chamber of Commerce.

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