

SUBMISSION TO THE 2018 REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Federal Government's 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. Please see below Golden Plains Shire Council's submission.

Overview of Golden Plains Shire Council

Golden Plains Shire is located between Geelong and Ballarat, two of Victoria's largest regional cities. The Shire has a population of over 22,000 people, and an industry that is largely centred around agriculture, with one quarter of the Shire's economic output generated by the sector. Three quarters of our workforce travel outside of the region for work, mainly to Geelong and Ballarat.

Telecommunications in Golden Plains Shire

Access to reliable telecommunications is vital for residents and businesses in Golden Plains Shire, and more infrastructure is needed to meet the needs of our rapidly growing community.

Telecommunications are crucial for economic growth and investment, and for community connectivity and safety. While parts of the Shire have access to NBN and mobile phone coverage, access to telecommunications is still an issue for many areas, including the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct.

Golden Plains Shire has ten communities who are serviced by Fixed Wireless NBN Towers, with a further five communities set to receive coverage with the completion of more towers in the upcoming months. The Shire's main service centre, Bannockburn, has fixed line NBN, which went live in 2016.

The Golden Plains Food Production Precinct in Lethbridge is an area of concern, with maps released by NBN Co to date indicating that numerous parts of the Precinct will not be covered. This can affect investment attraction, as well as safety and productivity of existing intensive agricultural investors.

Council is lobbying for the Precinct to receive full coverage from NBN Fixed Wireless.

The Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program has helped fund two new mobile towers in the fire-prone townships of Dereel and Steiglitz.

Optus has announced that three new towers will be built in Teesdale, Cape Clear and Haddon North by the end of 2018.

While the towers have significantly improved the quality of life for residents and business owners, and improved safety, there is still more to be done to meet the needs of our communities. Council is lobbying for further Mobile Black Spot Program funding for three new mobile phone towers to provide service for fire-prone areas, industry and events.

Telecommunications issues in Golden Plains Shire

Poor telecommunications coverage is creating issues and challenges in communities across Golden Plains Shire.

The Shire is a fire prone region, and access to reliable telecommunications is crucial for the safety and connectivity of our residents and businesses so that the community can access warnings and updates during emergencies.

Poor telecommunications coverage and access is also hindering business growth and expansion in the Shire.

In 2017 Golden Plains Shire Council surveyed businesses in the Shire and asked them how they would rate their access to telecommunications in terms of speed, reliability and capacity. 46% of respondents advised that their mobile phone coverage was either fair or poor, and 38% of respondents advised that their Broadband Internet access was either fair or poor (2017 Golden Plains Business Survey).

Examples include:

- Only parts of the Golden Plains Food Production Precinct near the town of Lethbridge will be covered by Fixed Wireless NBN. The Precinct has been supplied with a \$11.78M water supply which will stimulate \$160M in investment and over 700 jobs over ten years, but it needs adequate telecommunications coverage in order to be able to maximise investment opportunities. Those operators with good Internet coverage in the Precinct have been able to fully automate their operations, and are able to monitor production from off site as well as implement state of the art technology which can monitor productivity and energy savings.
- The town of Smythesdale in the Shire's north has Fixed Wireless NBN, however Council has received reports that long Internet outages have had significant impacts on businesses who rely heavily on Internet access.
- Businesses who are located just out of reach of NBN Fixed Wireless Towers have advised that they are considering re-locating to more urban areas of the Shire that have Fixed Wireless NBN coverage so that they can operate their business.
- Real Estate Agents have advised that lack of NBN coverage is deterring people from buying property in areas with poor telecommunications coverage.
- Lack of telecommunications coverage is an issue for the Shire's renown Moorabool Valley wine region. Businesses including wineries and tourism operators in the valley struggle to access telecommunications to run their business and to cater for the growing tourism market.
- The iconic Meredith Music Festival and Golden Plains Music Festival site has no mobile phone coverage. The festival organisers have to hire portable mobile phone towers for each event at significant cost. Industry surrounding the festival site have advised that the only time they can access mobile phone coverage is when the festival brings in the portable towers.
- Developers who are building an estate in a town with poor telecommunications coverage are looking at innovative ways to bring high speed Broadband Internet fibre to the home of each house in the estate to address the demand for improved telecommunications.

Contact

Thank you for considering our submission to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. For further information please contact:

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