



Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

LGANT Submission to **REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW 2018**

Via email to: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

24 July 2018

1. About this submission

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) makes this submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2018.

The submission includes responses to many of the questions listed in the issues paper at Appendix 1. The submission provides background information on LGANT and local government in the Northern Territory

LGANT:

Exists as a provider of support services, a coordinator of collective effort and an advocate for its member councils and forms part of the system of local government in Australia which includes Councils, State and Territory local government associations and the Australian Local Government Association

is governed by its constitution and charter and has an Executive Board of nine members drawn from its membership comprising the 17 local government councils established under the *Local Government Act* (the Act) in the Northern Territory

adopts policy positions on a range of issues by resolution amongst members at biannual general meetings or monthly Executive meetings

has a Chief Executive Officer and staff who manage the operations of the organisation

is a member of the Australian Local Government Association with two elected members being members of its Board.

Local Government

Local government provides services and maintains community infrastructure and facilities for residents and visitors in the Northern Territory within geographical areas where they exercise responsibility as governments under the Act.

The characteristics of councils in the Northern Territory are depicted in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1

Urban Capital City	Urban Fringe Small	Urban Rural Small	Rural Agricultural Very Large
City of Darwin	City of Palmerston	Alice Springs Town Council Katherine Town Council	Litchfield Council

The major characteristics of these councils include:

- **servicing the bulk of the Northern Territory population**
- headquarters in their local government areas and operating largely in single, relatively small urban environments
- accommodating staff within these environments, usually through individual home ownership or the private housing rental market
- **large number of rateable properties**
- **receiving a large portion of their revenue from rates and service charges (generally above 60 per cent of total revenue) which are linked to growth and hence these councils are less reliant on government grants**
- providing core local government services, facilities and infrastructure
- **a greater capacity to partner with the private sector in the delivery of services**
- rarely acting as agent of the Territory or Commonwealth governments in the delivery of services
- **having socio-economic indexes for their areas which are a mix of advantaged and disadvantaged.**

Table 2
12 Northern Territory Regional and Shire Councils by Classification
and Number of Townships Served

Rural Remote Large	Rural Remote Medium	Rural Remote Extra Small
Barkly Regional Council (six towns and one major centre)	Coomalie Community Government Council (Shire – two towns and rural areas)	Belyuen Community Government Council (Shire – one town)
Central Desert Regional Council (nine towns)	Tiwi Islands Regional Council (four towns on two islands)	Wagait Shire (one town)
East Arnhem Regional Council (nine towns, five of them on islands)	Victoria Daly Regional Council (five towns)	
MacDonnell Regional Council (13 towns)	West Daly Regional Council (three towns)	
Roper Gulf Regional Council (nine towns)		
West Arnhem Regional Council (five towns)		

The characteristics of these councils include:

- **servicing a smaller portion of the Northern Territory’s population over a large land mass and with all 67 towns serviced having between 200 and 4 000 residents**
- nearly all have their headquarters in a municipal area
- **are the largest employers of Indigenous people in remote areas with between 60% and 80% of total workforces made up of Indigenous people**
- **small numbers of rateable properties with a fair proportion of those (pastoral and mining tenements) subject to conditional rating**
- receiving a large proportion – often in excess of 90% - of revenues from government grants
- providing many services on behalf of, or as an agent of, the Territory and Commonwealth governments
- **having socio-economic indexes for their areas which are amongst the most disadvantaged in Australia ‘in terms of people’s access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, www.abs.gov.au)**

Local government makes a significant contribution to the Northern Territory economy as collectively councils employ 3000 Territorians, manage and control assets valued at over \$900 million and receive and expend over \$400 million in the Northern Territory annually.

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

The greatest barrier to increased use of digital technologies in regional and remote areas is the high cost of telecommunications

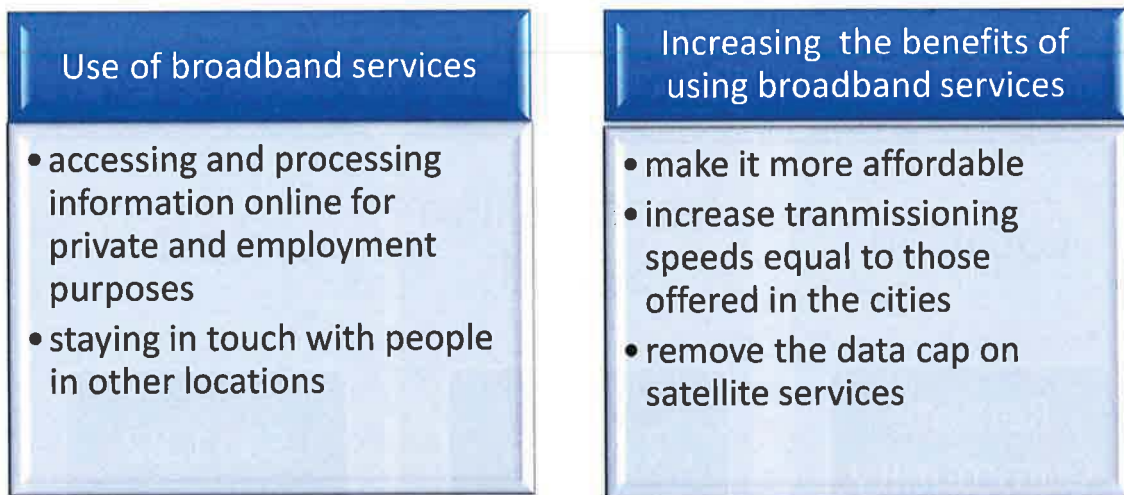
Solutions

- find ways to bring about the cross-subsidation of telecommunication costs so that people in the cities pay more and regional and remote residents pay less than the exorbitant rates they are charged now.
- improve satellite services
- increase subsidies for telecommunications infrastructure

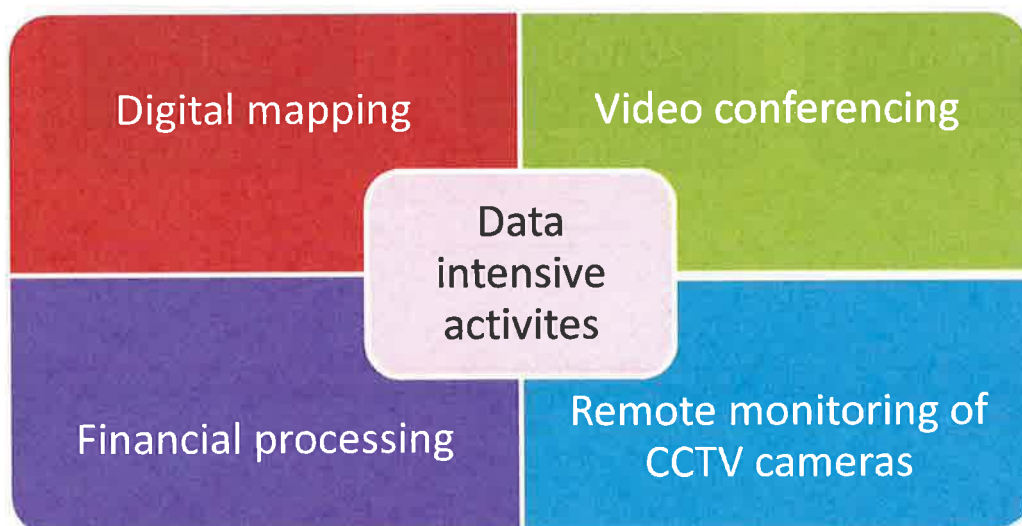
A good example of the cost of telecommunications between locations in the Northern Territory is given below:

Location	Transmission Speed	Cost
Remote Community	2 Mbps	\$911.82
Tennant Creek	10 Mbps	\$977.27
Darwin	20 Mbps	\$134.00

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



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



Digital Technologies Needed for Data Intensive Activities

Affordable
broadband

The data cap on
satellite
services is
removed

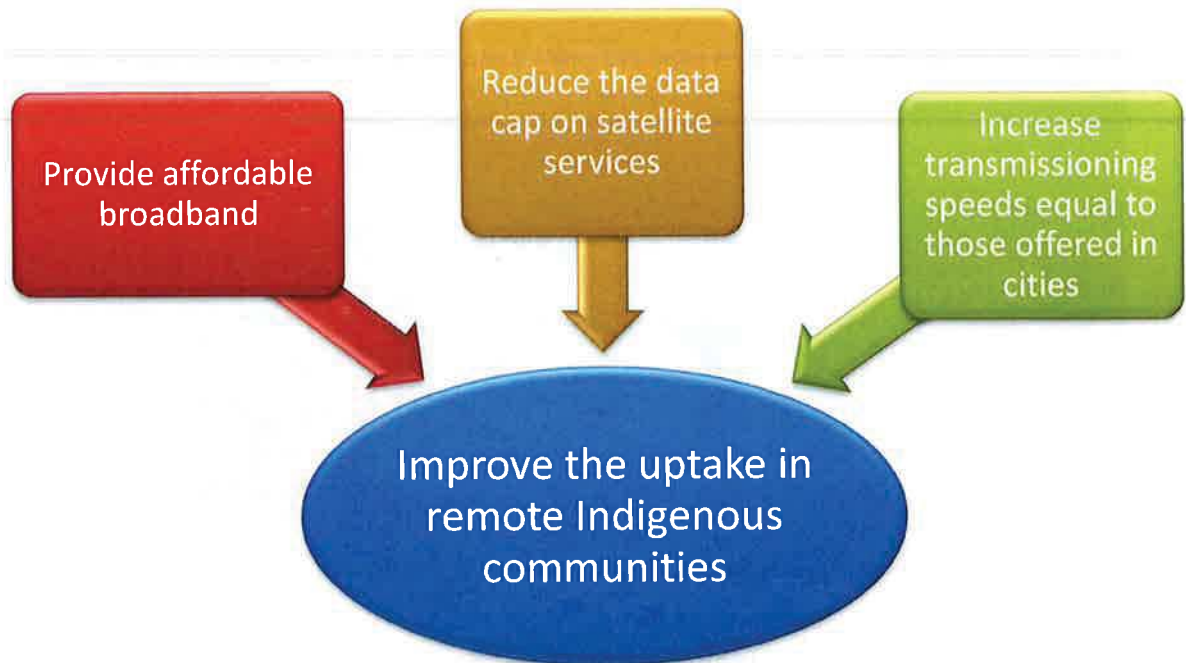
Increase
transmission
speeds equal to
those offered in
cities

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

LGANT concurs with the information listed in the Northern Territory Government's, *Discussion Paper, towards a digital strategy for the Northern Territory* (2017) which states:

'Leverageing digital technology to enable businesses in the bush to promote products and service reach a much bigger customer base, improving business viability and enabling businesses to grow in the bush....Finding further new ways to use technology such as drones, sensors, social media online marketing and virtual reality will open up new markets.'

6. What can be done to improve access to and uptake of telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities?



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

The mere fact that people can access digital technologies and use them for all their worth is ample reason for improving the well-being of people in remote Indigenous communities. As mentioned in the Northern Territory Government's *Discussion Paper*:

'Removing barriers for people in remote locations through using technology to improve access to healthcare, education and other government services in the community will enhance quality of life and reduce the need to travel for services.'

'Collaboration between business, government and community groups to share knowledge and provide technical training to those in need will deliver benefits across the community.'

'Finding ways to assist disadvantaged and low income citizens access digital information and services will make life easier'

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

People obviously need access to digital literacy programs to gain the skills needed for using digital technologies. People can learn the skills at schools, in public libraries and through adult education programs or through workplace training programs.

The Northern Territory Government's *Discussion Paper* mentions:

Digital Skills	Digital Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• our kids need to be more digitally-literate• they need to be digital masters• we need to encourage them to become digital creators, not just consumers of the digital world• its about equipping them with important skills like critical thinking and problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the pace of digital advancement requires ongoing and highly adaptive learning programs• students need to learn digital skills to prepare them for future careers• they need access to ICT and related subjects in schools, training opportunities and pathways in industry and government

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

Yes, there is data cap as mentioned above.

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

Remote councils are using the service. They have no other choice. Individuals may choose not to take up the service based solely on cost.

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

Economic indicators are unlikely to be as evident in small population areas compared to larger ones but there will always be a social case for guiding investments in such places.



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