



NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC.

Advancing and protecting the interests of cattle producers in the Northern Territory

Member - National Farmers' Federation & Cattle Council of Australia

NTCA Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review

The NTCA thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to make a written submission in conjunction with the verbal submission made by Allison Dakin in Katherine on 6 June 2018.

The Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) has been the peak primary industry body in the Northern Territory for the past thirty-four years. Representing over ninety per cent of the Territory's cattle herd, from small family pastoral businesses and Indigenous organisations to large corporate entities, its members are custodians of over 700,000km² of the NT landmass.

NTCA members live, work and operate their businesses from some of the most remote places in Australia, whilst still relying on telecommunications systems and technology which is decades old and long since upgraded in metropolitan and regional areas of Australia.

Telephones

The majority of NTCA members reside within the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation (TUSO) Zone. The TUSO Zone was originally implemented with the intention of ensuring that reasonable access to a standard telephone service be available to all Australians.

In 2017, the Productivity Commission released a final report which stated the TUSO is 'anachronistic and costly' and should be wound up by 2020. This statement was on that basis that Australians are well served by mobile networks with over 99 percent of people having access to mobile telephony (and broadband) where they live.

The recommendation of the Productivity Commission that the objective of the TUSO be reframed to provide voice services to all premises through broadband is a real to those families who reside in an area which

Currently the service time for the repair of any faults can take weeks. During this time, they must rely on their limited satellite internet access to communicate with the outside world through basic email. There are circumstances where it is possible to lose both land line and satellite internet and they are left with only UHF radio communications. This is most likely to happen in the wet season when service and reception is volatile.

When our members contact Telstra to report their faults, they are usually told to use their mobile phones until the fault is repaired – or made an offer to divert all their incoming calls through their mobile phone. When told that this is not possible, it often creates confusion on behalf of the service providers customer service officers. There is a distinct lack of understanding of remote customers within the customer service officers of service providers.

Long wait times for repairs, "bad connections", acoustic shrieks and expensive telephone calls are all part and parcel of living in remote parts of the Northern Territory. Although the quality of these services

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are sub-par to our metropolitan counterparts, the land lines is an essential service which must be maintained.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phone service is still extremely limited to those stations surrounding towns and major aboriginal communities. An installation of a mobile phone tower at a neighbouring aboriginal community does not always guarantee that a nearby station complex will also receive reception.

Yarralin Community west of Katherine in the Victoria River District, is to receive a mobile phone tower by end of 2019, however there was no guarantee that mobile phone reception would be extended to Victoria River Downs which is located only 20km as the crow flies from the proposed tower and houses up to 80 people in the dry season. It took quite some time to obtain an assurance that the tower capability would indeed service the area – however it remains to be seen how strong this signal will be.

Text Messaging

Current government (my.gov.au) and private service providers (banks etc) require that when accessing accounts or personal information online, the user must receive a text message with a code to enable use of the service. Quite often it is difficult or not possible at all to access these services if the user does not have access to text messaging.

Internet Access

Most of pastoral properties connected in some form to the internet are connected to the Skymuster system. Access and reliability is not consistent across the Northern Territory with recurring issues of dropouts and slow fault repair times.

The Pastoral industry embraces technology and the advantages that it can bring to productivity and processes, but without reliable NBN, this is not able to occur. In 2018, the theme of the NTCA Industry Conference was *Innovation Generation*. We had a fantastic line-up of speakers who brought technology to our doorsteps and showed us what is possible. A continual line of feedback from attendees was, 'how do we implement these ideas when we do not have the infrastructure to support it?'. From 3D modelling of cattle yards and infrastructure to live uploads and analysis of remote precision weigh the opportunities for pastoral businesses in the tech world is huge and fast moving.

Another serious impediment to remote commercial enterprises is the size of available data plans, including the allocation of on-peak and off-peak data. The times of off-peak data (where the largest proportion of data is available) is usually very late at night and at a time when most people are asleep. It is a challenging environment to operate a business in and an impediment that is specific to remote enterprises.



2018 Survey of NTCA Members

Following the verbal submissions made to the enquiry in Katherine on 6 June 2018, a survey of NTCA members was conducted to enable up to date data and current issues to be included in these submissions. Those results are attached at Annexure 1. This response accounts for over 17% of pastoral properties in the Northern Territory.

It is imperative that the current services which are available to our members living remotely in the Northern Territory are a baseline which must not be lowered in any way. Any shifting of the baseline must only be in an upward trajectory enabling people who live and work in remote parts of the Northern Territory the same access and connect-ability which is afforded to the remaining 99% of Australia.

The NTCA is committed to remain engaged in the review process, and if the Committee requires further information regarding this submission, it is urged to contact NTCA President Chris Nott at any time.

Contact:

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Annexure 1

2018 Telecommunications survey of NTCA Members

1. How satisfied are you with the reliability of your NBN Connection?

Completely unreliable – Doesn't work most of the time	Unreliable – Doesn't work sometimes	Neutral	Reliable – works most of the time	Very reliable – works practically all of the time	N/A – or No answer	Total
2 5.13%	10 25.64%	7 17.95%	18 46.15%	1 2.56%	1 2.56%	39

2. How satisfied are you with the speed of your NBN Connection?

Not satisfied – very slow downloads/uploads (unable to do simple day to day e.g. internet banking)	Somewhat unsatisfied – Slow downloads/uploads	Neutral	Somewhat satisfied – adequate downloads/uploads	Very satisfied – fast downloads/uploads (movies, YouTube load quickly)	N/A – or No answer	Total
6 15.38%	13 33.33%	7 17.95%	10 25.64%	2 5.13%	1 2.56%	39

3. How satisfied are you with your landline telephone service?

Not satisfied	Somewhat unsatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A – or No answer	Total
3 7.89%	4 10.53%	3 7.89%	15 39.74%	9 23.68%	5 12.82%	39

4. Do you have access to mobile phone service on your property?

Yes	No
9 23.08%	30 76.92%

5. Is your mobile phone service adequate to allow for the disconnection of your landline service?

Yes	No	N/A – or no answer
2 5.13%	26 66.67%	11

6. If you currently use VOIP, how satisfied are you with the service?

Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	N/A – or No answer	Total
3 7.89%	3 7.89%	3 7.89%	1 2.63%	0 0.00%	28 74.35%	39



7. Do you have any comments about your telecommunications services?

- We miss a lot of messages and calls as people do not realize not everyone has coverage.
- Very disappointed with the NBN satellite. The old satellite internet service was more reliable
- Skymuster through activ8 was pretty good for nearly 12 months but lately dropouts and outages have been more common. Landline is critical. Radio-tel fault fixing in the last 12 months has been a circus with poor systems and logistics within Telstra to follow up, acquit and repair.
- Technicians passing remote property with fault reported without dropping in. SMS messages to faults fixed when not. Technicians dropping in to fix fault reported 9 months prior and fixed 6 months prior.
- NBN very slow. If we had Mobile coverage that would give us much better download speeds
- Telstra service was recently upgraded. Service is much worse. Delays during conversations, screeching during conversations. Random outages.
- Our landline service is absolutely essential for our safety for our life in the bush. We are very lucky that our phones work every hour through heavy cloud/storms/fires and do not have regular upgrades which shuts the service down at their choice not ours.
- Internet through NBN Skymuster quite good. Landline through Active8 fairly good
- Several times in the past year the phone service fails and it has been 2-3 weeks before the faults are restored
- Landline service on one property out of service several times in last six months for extended periods of time.(VOIP using mobile has assisted in these periods) Connection on another property was faulty for most of wet season. (2016/17 season)
- Does not provide enough data for our business
- We require independent communications methods to ensure the business can operate effectively and safely. At the barest minimum, this is covered by SkyMuster and landline telephones. As we have no mobile coverage, we cannot access Internet through any other means where SkyMuster is offline.
- Frustrating unreliable, why do we get locked into contracts where service is not anywhere near premises, but we HAVE to pay for it.
- Our son is on a trial with Mount Isa School of The Air using the VOIP system for his on air lesson and he has to change to the landline most days, due to the lag over VOIP.
- Our landlines all makes an awful screeching noise, very randomly, Telstra doesn't seem to be able to fix it.
- I had no phone service for 2 and a half months this year and that cost me a sale not to mention the lack of communication with family and just interruption of general business - AND I had to get the Ombudsman onto Telstra to pull them into line AND our whole area had lengthy delays (as in weeks with no phone service so you could not even go to a neighbours place to make phone calls) - the Township of Larrimah in particular was badly affected by outages in NBN AND phone service.
- When our landline goes out it takes WEEKS to fix, very frustrating
- The service can be unreliable and it is difficult to get that message across to Telstra
- Landlines must be maintained to allow multiple communication options for business and personal requirements.