

RIVERVIEW FARMING



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Regional Telecommunications

I attended a Consultation Review in Wagga Wagga on Thursday 5th July and found it to be a very interesting, structured and information platform to cast our views on where the telecommunications industry is regarding regional Australia today.

I feel the main barriers to people in regional communities at present is the lack of quality of service and the price being paid for this lack of service. Operating a business, as well as educating our children on services that are minimal to nothing some days, and outstanding others, causes much angst. When you need it to work, whether it be for end of month accounts or children's assignments, I spend hours setting and re-setting the NBN, but other times it works beautifully.

The cost of this service that we spend volunteer hours each month keeping it operational, is ridiculous. We are paying \$94/month for 140GB off peak data (barely used) and 100GB of peak data. In comparison, the first plan I found for the broadband user in a quick search was \$80/month for unlimited data. I realise the way the internet is delivered to us is different, but aren't rural people already limited with services, why does this have to be another service that we have to pay so much more for?

To keep up with other businesses we are relying more and more of the internet when looking to develop efficiencies in our business but are unable to take on these efficiencies due to the limited service provided in our area.

As a business we personally invested \$25,000 on a 25mtr light communication pole with telco antenna and cel-fi go mobile smart repeaters to help with the internet at our main office and workshop complex. We are now in the process of investigating ourselves, how we can radiate this internet out into the fields and our other farms to make the most out of our investment.

This has been a long, interesting and educational journey, but not everyone has the time, resources and money to be able to afford or understand how this works. There needs to be more people on the ground, and available at a reasonable (or no) cost, assessing peoples individual situations and coming up with solutions that work for them. The current NBN installation process seems to be one set of rules for all households, and this is not always

the best fit. This has been one of the biggest frustrations with the service, if the installers were genuinely concerned about the results of each household, instead of how many installs they could achieve in a day, then they could spend more time installing these systems in the best places to achieve the best results for rural people.

Some of the technologies that we use (or would like to use) within our business include:

- Cloud accounting & file storage
- Automated irrigation systems
- GPS tractor guidance systems
- Automated stock troughs
- Cloud based paddock management systems

Some of these we have been able to achieve thanks to our communications tower, but others are still waiting on improved services out in the field.

Another issue that worries me is the availability of information on how to use devices to improve mobile reception in areas with poor coverage. At the consultation review I met an older lady who has no mobile phone reception at her house and never has. She has internet service and had never been told about wifi calling. I explained to her how it works and tried to set it up on her phone, but her phone was too old and didn't have the capabilities to turn it on. She was going to go down to the shop and purchase a new phone that same day if this was all it took to enable her to use her mobile phone at home. Why hadn't she previously been told about it when she had complained?

The older generation, who also need access to mobile and internet services for their safety and wellbeing, are the people who are getting left behind unless they have someone from the younger generation helping them along the way. This is an even bigger issue in the rural areas where they may not have a neighbour close by to keep an eye on them.

I am not sure what the solution is going forward, but I feel that more emphasis needs to be placed on the telecommunications industry in rural Australia for education, technology, efficiencies and safety as these areas are all being hugely affected by the current inadequacies.

I am happy to discuss any of these points with you further if you require and looking forward to hearing the outcomes of this consultation review.

Regards,

Stacey Storrier

