



TASMANIAN FARMERS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION

2018 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat
Department of Communications and Arts
CANBERRA ACT 2601

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TFGA Submission – 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture is one of the key pillars of the economy and, with the current level of support from government, are well positioned to further capitalise on the stature of Tasmania agriculture.

The TFGA appreciates the opportunity to make comment to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee on the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

Agriculture has an enormous uptake of new technology, we employ thousands of people, we keep many rural communities alive, and we produce the clean, healthy, fresh food that Tasmanian families take for granted, and indeed that families across the country and world enjoy.

The business efficiencies and improvements that can be gained through the uptake of technology cannot be understated. The efficiencies that can be gained through the implementation of technology through projects such as Sense-T (Sense-T was a first mover in the internet of things and big data in Tasmania) will help Tasmania grow and compete in international markets.

If we fail to keep pace with technology and take advantage of the advantages that it offers, then we will fall behind other states and countries. If we remain pro-active and try to position ourselves at the front of the pack through early adoption, then we may be able to offset some of our challenges such as freight through efficiency gains delivered by technology such as robotic dairies and sensory technology.

The Regional Telecommunications Review (2015) told us that “telecommunications have and will continue to shape the lives and improve the economic opportunities of people in regional Australia”. The very same document stated that the “extent and quality of mobile coverage was (/is) a major concern of people in regional Australia”, this is no different in regional Tasmania. The 2015 review also

stated that “regional Australians have a higher dependence on mobiles than their urban counterparts because of the broader geographic range within which many conduct their working and everyday lives”.

The 2018 Review is saying “telecommunications services are vital to participate in modern society”. And “there are still some challenges to connecting with essential government and business services in regional Australia”.

This is nothing new, or unexpected in regional areas with regards to mobile networks and is most definitely not news to the TFGA’s membership. But, in a digital age many regional Tasmanians are being left behind, with little to no mobile service, this inhibits their ability to participate in the digital economy, culture and basic communication. This is not to imply that this is the norm across Tasmania, in many instances many of the TFGA’s members are more than adequately serviced by a provider, in most of their mobile requirements.

Despite its small size Tasmania’s terrain proves a challenge in ensuring adequate coverage is achieved as most current technology in this area works on ‘a line of sight’ rule for implementation and there is little commercial impetus for private (or quasi private) companies to ensure service coverage in the sparsely populated areas.

Currently many Tasmanian farmers have an internet and mobile phone service that is patchy at best or non-existent. This is not just in remoter areas such as Royal George or Togari; but even just outside of Campbell Town or Bothwell internet coverage is a challenge.

Farmers want to access the new technologies reliant on broadband connectivity, including precision agriculture, irrigation automation, remote sensing technology, farm biosecurity and livestock monitoring. However, poor connectivity is reducing agriculture’s ability to make greater productivity gains.

There is good work been undertaken to increase coverage across rural and regional Tasmania with programs like the Mobile Black Spot Programme. Recent areas across the State that have seen funding to assist in network speed and coverage have been Flinders Island, West Coast, East Coast and Tasman Peninsula, which TFGA is very supportive of.

The TFGA strongly encourages that this program continues and be complemented with innovative solutions that will fully utilise the potential of the National Broadband Network (NBN).

Competition in regional Tasmania is limited at best. While there has been some improvement in competition over the 18 years since the first inquiry into mobile roaming in 1998, regional areas still lack adequate competition and service in many areas.

The rollout of the NBN opens a range of opportunities for collaboration with mobile phone carriers to maximise the use of NBN infrastructure.

The TFGA believe there are opportunities to encourage open sharing of NBN fixed wireless and network transmission infrastructure with mobile network operators to encourage increased competition and maximise coverage in rural and regional areas.

The TFGA is steadfast in its belief that all our members and regional Tasmanians should have access to, or expect that:

- an equitable, sustainable and affordable mobile network be developed and maintained.
- telecommunication companies are profitable, and as such will provide a high-quality service for all Tasmanians.
- high quality internet and mobile services are provided at a viable and equitable price.
- the mobile network will be expanded to accommodate all Tasmanians where and however possible.

Please contact the TFGA if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Skillern', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Peter Skillern

Chief Executive Officer

6th August 2018