

The Committee in 2018 is comprised of Mr Sean Edwards (Chair), Ms Wendy Duncan, Ms Johanna Plante, Ms Robbie Sefton, Ms Kylie Stretton and Mr Paul Weller.

- how regional communities can maximise the economic benefits of digital technologies
- how regional consumers use their broadband services and how they might derive further benefit from it
- the outcomes achieved through the Mobile Black Spot Program and examine the extent of the existing gaps in mobile coverage in regional Australia.

Business Education & Health

Example - In the health sector, nbn has partnered with the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) to provide broadband to 24 bases and 300 remote area clinics across Australia. Many of these remote clinics previously had little or no internet connectivity and will now receive broadband through the Sky Muster satellites.

The Committee is interested in hearing views about the order-of-magnitude increases in data capability that will be required to provide quality education, health and social services to regional Australians.

- 1. What are the main barriers to people in regional communities increasing their use of digital technologies and possible solutions for overcoming these barriers?**
 - a. **Poor Data Coverage** – mobile coverage is patchy across the wider spectrum of the geographic area.
 - b. **High cost** of set up of enabling equipment-additional antennas (\$1,000 each) booster boxes and vehicle antennas.
 - c. Current Mobile Towers capacity to deliver a service to meet the increased demands is insufficient.
 - d. Small towns are finding that the influx of caravans over the winter or other high users of data drain the “allotted data” and then the town business isn’t able to work their EFTOS machines etc. let alone conduction business online. Eg Thallon & Nindigully towers.
 - e. The high costs of mobile single provider access in rural areas in comparison to the multiple-choice access in the major cities.

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

Doing business in the south west is greatly hampered by lack of mobile coverage. The technology available to farmers and graziers is fantastic but a lack of mobile coverage makes this inaccessible for people in the south west.

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

Attracting experienced (or inexperienced) health, education and other skilled workers to these areas is very difficult and to add the extra deterrent of driving without any mobile coverage for 2 or more hours

- 4. How can regional businesses better utilise digital technologies to maximise economic benefits?**

By adaptation and with some one on one support to implement technologies as relevant and suitable to existing infrastructure. Data needs to be enabled. Currently access is intermittent at best.

- 5. What can be done to improve access to and uptake of telecommunications services in remote ~~Indigenous~~ rural communities?**

Consultation _ This is a really big issue in South West QLD, not so much in indigenous communities as they seem to have access to internet across their community lands. Note there is no meeting anywhere in south west QLD which has no mobile access. Longreach has mobile coverage and always gets the attention. We are 6 ¼ hours from Dalby and 7 ½ hours to Longreach so to get to either of these meetings with less than a week’s notice is difficult and in the middle of a drought more so.

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

There is limited mobile cover anywhere west of Bollon and south of Charleville.

The isolated roads have incredible numbers of grey nomads travelling on them, not to mention the locals, truck drivers and Emergency Services who are greatly disadvantaged by lack of mobile coverage. Lives are endangered as the highways are long and lonely places, the numbers of wildlife on the roads, distances between towns and the number of inexperienced country road drivers is increasing as are the accidents.

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

By adaptation and with some one on one support to learn about and implement usage of technologies as relevant and suitable to existing infrastructure. Data needs to be enabled. Currently access is intermittent at best.

So the lack of reliable coverage is restricting people's access to technology which means they have limited opportunities to develop skills.

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

Inability to understand what will work, time and \$ limited to spend on infrastructure which may not work. Overseas language workers on support lines - unable to understand rural Australian geography or limitations.

Illegal boosters being used - which drain the data from an area. These take technician man-hours/ weeks to track down.

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

We are between two mobile towers at Nindigully and Thallon. Investment was made into External antennas and Booster boxes and Net Gear WIFI, to ensure, within the house, mobile phone coverage and the office computer access to the internet.

We have not taken up NBN Skymuster satellite service as it may not be affordable. It will not enable mobile phone access and it has had too many failings to consider going down the track of another set of technology and cost...when we can't be sure it will improve our current (slow and still costly in comparison to urban small business) system.

We would need on farm one on one support and encouragement that the Sky Muster was going to be relevant to us, better \$ value than the existing system.

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

Expanding mobile coverage has clear economic, social and public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote Australia. Addressing the total lack of coverage for vast areas; areas where both business and tourism bring wealth to the Australian economy, and people live in isolation is very important and beyond the current status quo of economic or social indicators for assessment.

11. Is information readily available regarding how to use devices to improve mobile reception in areas with poor coverage? e.g. information about external antenna equipment?

As this information is usually only available on line access to it is again effected by intermittent unreliable internet and unsuitable devices can be recommended as people giving the advice are not familiar with local conditions eg. Recommending 4G modems for 3G areas.

12. What emerging digital services will be of most benefit to regional businesses and what are the data needs of these services?

Noorama Picnic Race Club secretary highlighting the issue with Federal and State Politicians.

Noorama is 124k south east of Cunnamulla, 254k north east of Bourke and 73k or 112k (depending on which dirt road you take) north of the Qld/NSW boarder has an annual picnic race meeting which draws a large crowd and so safety is a major concern and response times for accidents and emergencies are slow further hampered by a lack of mobile coverage.

There has been one fatality within 5k of Noorama in recent years.

The lack of mobile coverage meant the young accident victim had no way of calling for help and had to wait several hours for a vehicle with UHF radio to come along to radio for assistance.

13. What broadband services are people using other than those available through the NBN?

Snail mail.

Landline telephone

Mobile 4G and 3G

Mobile Wireless

14. How can more competition be encouraged in the provision of broadband services in regional Australia?

The relatively small number of customers spread over a vast area makes this difficult as many companies may not be willing to come in and provide services where profit could be marginal at best. However fast reliable telecommunications should be a "given" for all Australians in this day and age so the Government needs to find a way to provide service and pricing that is comparable to those enjoyed in more populated areas or they risk creating an even greater divide between the city and the bush. Technology is touted as the way of the future for farming and should be a way of defeating the tyranny of distance but if the poor state of regional telecommunications cannot be addressed people in rural Australia will be left behind.