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2018 Regional Telecommunications Review
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Dear Review Committee

2018 Regional Telecommunications Review

The Country Women's Association of Australia (CWAA) appreciates the opportunity to input into the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) on behalf of its members across Australia.

The CWAA advances the rights and equity of women, families and communities through advocacy and empowerment, especially for those living in Rural, Regional and Remote (RRR) Australia. CWA has 22,000 members in 1,500 branches from metropolitan to RRR areas of Australia.

Telecommunications is a vital element for the day to day lives of members and as such the CWAA is a member of or sits on the following organisations which has a focus with telecommunications. These include:

- ACCAN – Australian Communications Consumer Action Network - member
- ACMA – Australian Communications and Media Authority – Consumer Consultative Committee
- RRRCC – Rural Regional Remote Communications Coalition – member.

CWAA supports the submissions, provision of supportive data and technical details and the work of these organisations into this review and other legislative reviews on telecommunications. This response is supplementary to their input and kept at a general comment level.

CWAA General principles:

1) Access to telecommunications is a human right

- a) It is evident that anyone who does not have access to telecommunication services is falling behind or has limited opportunities compared to those that do in term of communication, social interaction, education, business and being informed and this is particularly so for RRR
- b) Our representation at the United Nations CSW62 clearly evidences the work around the world to ensure that all humans have access to telecommunications and we ask this committee to be mindful of this position

2) Diversity of Customer

- a) Recognition that the customer is diverse and has individual needs – often generic one-size-fits-all technology solutions is not the case
- b) Diversity needs to be mindful of those that are: disabled; migrant; CALD; really remote; off shore; vulnerable; homeless; youth; elderly, those in high risk scenarios; and other sectors

3) A universal level of accessible, reliable and affordable service

- a) Supported by a service obligation that is technologically neutral and provides access to both voice and data
- b) A guaranteed minimum access to data and voice serviced across Australia
- c) No degradation to the current service levels offered
- d) Monitoring of costs and packages to ensure uniformity of costs across the network that are affordable by all

4) Truly universal Customer service guarantees

- a) Agreement to a basic universal service level guaranteed for every customer covering both voice and data
- b) Guarantees to include service levels, repair timeframes reliability
- c) Clear and reliable measures making retail providers and NBN Co accountable for service delivery

5) Commitment to the Mobile Black Spot Program

- a) Ongoing support and funding toward this program
- b) Identification and priority of community areas needing this program
- c) Encourage co-investment and multi-carrier support for greater coverage and provider options

6) Ongoing plan for Sky Muster

- a) Agreement that there are some customers for whom Sky Muster is the only reliable broadband communication option
- b) Plan for future service levels and products to meet customer needs
- c) Provision of this service with accessibility, reliability and cost equitable to other services

7) Ongoing Consumer digital literacy

- a) Funding support to build digital literacy for all customers – in all their diversity
- b) A clear independent central help desk for consumers to complain or seek information to assist with decision making on behalf of both the retailers and NBN Co as most consumers do not understand the difference

The following is the CWAA direct response to the questions posed by this review:

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

Barriers

- Lack of understanding / confusion of what services are available
- Restrictions of services available and data packaging
- Cost of service
- Limited competition for service provision
- Limited digital literacy

Solutions

- Build digital literacy through community based programs eg young teaching old
- Ensure support materials are customer friendly taking into account literacy, language,
- Single source of information rather than going to multiple people for information eg retail package information currently can go to retailers, NBN Co, ACCAN, BIRR and others – who is the accurate holder of source information?
- Consistent information to compare services

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

Uses

- Contact with family and friends and social groups
- Personal Services – banking, internet
- Education – from early learning to tertiary studies
- Business – run the business, stay in contact with employees/customers
- Internet / information source
- Medical / Emergency access

Increase Benefits

- Can take advantage of technology innovation - if only they had telecommunications coverage eg agriculture use of drones, machinery, etc
- Run a business – if only they had telecommunications coverage eg start a business and run a web site and an order delivery platform
- Diversify opportunities using technology innovation or new jobs
- Sharing / informing consumers of what is available
- Central source of information to assist in decision making

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

Data-intensive

- Business
- Education
- Health and Emergency Services

Digital Technologies

- High Speed digital services eg NBN
- Voice and Data – home line, mobile, internet, broadband, etc
- Specialised services eg Sky Muster for some locations

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

- Education – training packages and information
- Health – telehealth, my health record, etc
- General Business – banking, business promotion eg web, twitter, social media, free internet to attract customers, etc
- Farmers – running business records, technology innovation take-up eg machinery, drones, regulators, water management, etc
- Individual – start a business

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

- Not an area of specialty for CWA
- Putting communication purchases eg phone credit on the restricted card as an authorised spend element
- Cheaper handsets and packages
- Digital literacy

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

- Education – learning remotely while staying on land
- Health – telehealth and access to specialists via data

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

- Program support eg young people teaching older people
- Club programs eg U3A, rotary, councils, webinars
- Information from internet eg UTube
- Retail providers
- Friends and Family

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

- Members do have issues – better information from ACCAN or BIRR

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

- Availability / reliability of service
- Cost of packages
- Unaware of service

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

- Take up of services
- By different social areas
- Co-investment
- Mobile coverage maps

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?

- Most people only source such information if they have a need ie most people would not know what this is or what it does unless they require one and then they chase the information down
- Often this depends on the retail representative who is servicing you to be willing to impart the information on a needs basis

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

- Farmers – see National Farmers Federation (NFF) model for Agribusiness
- “The internet of Anything” – no idea what is in this but all should have access to it to advance and grow
- Health – My Health Record
- Education – ongoing developments in this field
- Supplementary devices – eg home batteries developed to hold much more power – without power you do not have telecommunications so information on devices which support telecommunications should be made available
- Emergency services – evidence and experience of what is needed to support people in an emergency eg fire, flood, natural disaster
- Crisis – supporting and emerging technology to support people living in or fleeing from crisis eg domestic violence
- Network developments eg 5G

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

- See technical submissions from other sources

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

- Co-sharing equipment
- Repeater stations to increase coverage
- Community based installations which allow for business and consumer use to share the investment of infrastructure and to increase the footprint coverage
- Low digital solutions ie restrict the data usage for delivery of services
 - eg social services that need 2 sources of coverage ie internet and mobile – hard enough to get one let alone 2 services
 - eg web site information – often duplicated information and developed for the latest digital whiz bang interactions which uses a lot of data – not good if you have no coverage or restricted data packages

In summary, we seek telecommunication service coverage and services that are accessible, affordable, reliable and equal for all. Do not short-change people because they live and work in RRR as the divide and opportunities will grow wider from metropolitan counterparts. We are dependant on RRR people for food, jobs, GDP and we need to support RRR people which make up one third of the population of Australia.

CWAA thanks you for the opportunity to input into this review.

We wish you well in your deliberations and findings as you make recommendations for #betterbushcomms

If you need anything further, please contact me on [REDACTED]



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