

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

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Date: 28 February 2014

Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? Yes No

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.



28 February 2014

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

By email to: mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Advance Cairns welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Australian Government's Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper, to help inform the development of a programme to improve mobile coverage and competition in regional Australia.

Advance Cairns is the peak regional advocacy and economic development organisation for Tropical North Queensland (TNQ). We are a proactive, independent and apolitical organisation which brings together business and industry leaders and key decision makers to identify strategic priorities to address issues of regional importance. Our members represent the majority of the main businesses of the region and are high level influencers who want to be involved in making a positive contribution to the long-term development and progression of our region. We advocate on behalf of various projects, policies and plans which are determined by our members on an annual basis.

Our geographic area, which encompasses the Cairns region, (including Port Douglas), Cassowary Coast (Innisfail, Mission Beach and Tully), the Tablelands region and Cook Shire, has a population of nearly 245,000, supports more than 23,400 registered businesses and covers more than 270,000 km², or about one and a half times the size of the state of Victoria.

One of five regional priorities is *Positioning the Region for the Digital Economy*. This priority has been determined by our members and the Advance Cairns Board as aligning with our economic vision for our region, and one which will advance our region towards a more resilient economy.

Commentary

Mobile communication is considered essential for people to run businesses, work in remote areas, to encourage tourism and growth, and to have reliable communications in emergency situations, including cyclones. Connectivity supports the development of community resilience. Mobile communications and online services can provide better community access and sharing of information about local safety, security risks and critical incidents.

Advance Cairns

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Businesses are constantly frustrated by poor mobile coverage across the region, particularly as mobile phones become an important tool for conducting commercial transactions and communicating with clients and employees. Poor mobile phone coverage affects business productivity and limits the ability of regional businesses to fully participate in the digital economy. Mobile services are also vital to contractors working in remote areas for maintaining contact with their employers, and also for increased safety in emergency situations and accidents.

The introduction of telephony-based emergency warning systems highlights the need to improve mobile coverage across the region, for both local residents and visitors alike. Consistency and currency of information is critical to the effective management of emergency situations, like cyclones, tidal surges, bush fires and other events.

Having access to a reliable mobile service is also important for visitors to keep in touch with family and friends via phone, email or social media. Research shows that mobile coverage is a significant factor for visitors to stop in rural and region towns. There are also concerns about tourists and travellers in remote areas who are not aware of, or prepared for, the lack of mobile coverage. Increased mobile coverage in areas with poor or no coverage will have positive benefits for the region's \$2.4 billion tourism industry by encouraging travellers to visit and stay in more remote areas of the region.

A range of mobile blackspots have been identified by local government in submissions to this discussion paper, including by Cairns Regional Council, Cook Shire Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Tablelands Regional Council and Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Blackspots have also been identified in the submission by Gulf Savannah Development, covering the local government areas of Burke, Carpentaria, Doomadgee, Mornington and Etheridge.

Advance Cairns fully supports these submissions, and other local government submissions originating from within Tropical North Queensland. We trust due consideration will be given to addressing the identified blackspots first and foremost through the \$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project.

Responses to questions

Question 1: Would an appropriate minimum quality standard be that base stations must provide high-speed 4G LTE mobile broadband data communication services and also high quality 3G mobile voice and broadband data services? If this is not an appropriate minimum quality standard, what is?

Not all communities across the state currently have equitable access to effective mobile communication technologies. There is limited penetration of 3G off major highways and towns, and 4G networks are only accessible in main urban areas. Urban or metro-comparable access should be the basis for minimum quality standards for base stations.

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Question 5: Should bidders be able to propose to incorporate the use of base stations owned by NBN Co as part of their bid?

Yes. Shared public infrastructure will achieve significant cost efficiencies and should allow for much further reach of this programme into remote areas of Australia.

Question 17: Is there a more effective means of assessing seasonal demand than proposed in criterion 3 (c)?

As noted in the submission by Gulf Savannah Development, many tourists travelling in rural and remote regions across Tropical North Queensland do not stay in commercial accommodation. Further consideration therefore should be given to mobile coverage in areas where a concentration of tourism activity occurs but where commercial accommodation does not exist.

Question 18: To what extent would the use of the NBN fixed wireless network result in improved mobile coverage outcomes in regional Australia?

Apart from recognising the cost efficiencies of utilising the NBN fixed wireless network to improve mobile coverage, access to mobile communications can play a crucial role in overcoming inequities due to remoteness, to help to close the gap on access to health, education, training and employment opportunities and other basic services.

The uptake of digital technology through enablers like mobile data communication is critical to businesses in regional and rural communities in TNQ maintaining their competitiveness or gaining any competitive edge. The IBM / NIEIR report *'Reinventing Australian enterprises for the digital economy'* states that "the difference between the performance of an organisation that has a suitable business model for the digital age and one that doesn't can be so great that the followers are more likely to fail completely". It will be increasingly difficult for businesses to regain markets if they've lost them to more sophisticated business models, including those operating overseas, which have captured the benefits of the digital economy, especially through enablers like high speed broadband.

Advance Cairns seeks improved mobile coverage as an opportunity to increase the sustainability of our communities and make them more liveable and attractive to new and current residents. Greater access to digital services is a critical enabler to increasing the economic output of our region, contributing to a stronger region and a strong national economy.

The region's economy will thrive and diversify as existing and new businesses use mobile digital technologies to grow their markets, to improve productivity, to enhance their knowledge resources and to build new networks of suppliers and partners.

Conclusion

The region of TNQ seeks equitable access to mobile digital technology, and recognises this as an opportunity to significantly increase the sustainability, liveability and safety of our communities. Our need as a region is based on the exceptional combination of social, economic and environmental challenges we face and the significant opportunity that consistent and accessible mobile communications presents to address challenges and realise the region's growth potential. That is why positioning the region for the digital economy is strongly embedded as a priority in our local and regional strategies which specifically target economic diversity and the strengthening of education, health and research.

We commend the Australian Government's commitment to improving mobile coverage in regional Australia and look forward to the implementation of the \$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project and the \$20 million Mobile Blackspots Project so our region can take advantage of the economic development opportunities that equitable mobile coverage will bring.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Matthews', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Matthews
Chief Executive Officer

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