

## **Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN) Submission to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee - July 2015**

### **Section 1: General Comment**

The Australian Regional Tourism Network is the peak national body providing a network for regional tourism organisations and practitioners.

Reviewing the documentation it was disappointing to see that no mention or the consideration of tourism related activity was included for the review committee.

Many regional areas rely on tourism and the visitor economy to bring external monies and investment into regional communities providing not only a direct financial benefit to tourism businesses but it improves the social and economic fabric of a region.

Tourism businesses provide direct employment opportunities and support associated businesses that receive benefits by the provision of goods and services needed to operate a successful tourism entity.

Regional youth unemployment remains high across Australia and tourism businesses offer an entry level of employment to provide an opportunity to enter the workforce environment.

Marketing parameters being used by Tourism Australia, State Tourism Bodies, Regional Tourism Organisations, Local Government Associations, Visitor Information Centres and tourism businesses has changed dramatically over the past decade with a strong emphasis on the digital platforms.

The mixer of traditional and digital media has formed part of the everyday marketing programs of regional Australia allowing business to touch base with new and existing consumers.

Tourism Business need reliable communication infrastructure to conduct general business activity and connect to the global markets.

With many tourism regional businesses operating under the small to medium enterprises category and often family run operations, the key to success is flexibility provided by the communication system. The ability to be connected to the business while undertaking the general operations processes of cleaning, shopping, tour guiding, cooking and sourcing general services is crucial in the day to day operations.

Staying connected to the consumer and business base comes in many forms,

- Websites
- Email
- Phone – Mobile
- GPS – directions and mapping
- Payment processes - Banking
- Bookings and Reservations
- WiFi – internet
- Online booking distribution networks
- Webinars – training

All of these processes rely on being connected via communications, however regional Australia is struggling to provide these essential platforms to conduct business in-line with their urban counterparts. The disparity can never be underestimated as the consumer expects and demands that when they come to regional areas they will receive the same basic services that they use every day in their urban environment.

Unfortunately it has been an 'accepted normal' of living in regional Australia and the review has the opportunity to change this paradigm and bring urban and regional areas aligned.

Developing countries such as China have been investing in infrastructure to provide services across the vast land China ensuring that each and every provincial region is supported by telecommunications.

Something Australia could learn from as with Tourism Australia, All State tourism bodies focussing on the growth from the China tourism market let's find the solution now before they are problems.

For a number of years, many tourism businesses have expressed their frustrations at the ARTN Annual Convention on how disadvantaged regional operators have been held back by not having the basic infrastructure to operate a busy in the global economy.

**Some examples expressed:**

**Comment:** *We live in a region with no mobile coverage. Tourists come to stay on our station. We are located about 35 kilometres from Hawker. We believe there is an issue of visitor safety in a major tourism region. Since Spring 2011, there have been three incidents where tourists have injured themselves and it has taken 1.5 to 2 hours for someone from their party to walk back to alert us to contact the emergency services because there is no mobile coverage. While these incidents were not life threatening, it will only be a matter of time. **Rawnsley Park Station, South Australia***

**Comment:** Lack of Mobile coverage in certain areas effects small business in the tourism sector as tourists will not come unless they have some coverage.

The Australian Regional Tourism Network is grateful for the opportunity to submit to the Regional Communications Review and we look forward to working in partnership with the government to ensure our network of business are provided with the outcomes of the review in due course.

I would appreciate if you could send correspondence and results directly to myself

Thanks in advance

David Sheldon  
**Chair Australia Regional Tourism Network –ARTN**

## Section 2: Response to the Review Questions

1. Do people in regional Australia believe their reliance on telecommunications differs from those in urban areas? How does it differ and can you provide examples?

**Staying connected to the consumer (B2C) and business (B2B) comes in many forms and are below average compared to urban areas. Products and service used on a regular basis need reliable connection.**

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Q2. For those users already connected to an nbn network service, has the service met your expectations?

**Not many areas have access to NBN – only some with satellite and the system gets interruption when weather is in the area. The satellite network is also getting choked by over subscription.**

Q3. Having regard to the technical solution likely to be used in your area, do you have views on the adequacy of that solution in terms of meeting needs now and into the future?

**Comment from a business: There is no likelihood of Fibre Optic being used at Rawnsley Park. The best option would be to improve the mobile signal from Hawker. We approached Telstra in 2012 to quote for a booster tower near Rawnsley Caravan Park. Price quoted was \$200,000 which we were not prepared to accept.**

**Goobarragandra Valley Tumut has major black spots across the coverage.**

Q4. Irrespective of the adequacy of your local access, are there issues with backhaul or long distance carriage that impacts on your use of telecommunications services?

**An operator comment: We currently use a parabolic antennae to get the 3G signal for internet. The standard of this signal seems to be quite erratic. We consistently have very slow transmission speeds 5.00pm-6.00pm and again 9.00pm-10.00pm. This does not seem to be related to weather conditions so we can only assume that it is related to usage of the network during 'after school' and 'end of banking day' periods.**

Q5. For users living in areas without mobile coverage, what priorities, other than specific locations, do you consider should be recognised in future efforts to improve coverage?

**The issue of public safety in small communities and areas of high visitation should be considered. Visitor rely on maps and GPS to find services, towns and connections to feel safe. Many are city folk who do not understand that the 24/7 environment does not occur in regional areas.**

Q6. What opportunities do the mobile network industry see for extending coverage in regional Australia and increasing investment in mobile networks?

**Better services as business will pay what urban areas pay – but not for an inferior product.**

Q7. Do you have any views on co-investment approaches that might help to improve the broadband technology outcome in your area?

**Operator comment; There has to be cross-subsidization between high volume users and low volume if we are to get better coverage. There also has to be more providers allowed access to the Australian market.**

**An example provided by a tourism operator where his son was able to do a job interview from a remote camping ground in Mozambique because Indian Companies provide low cost telecommunications in that country.**

Q8. How might new applications and services that utilise mobile networks for voice and data transform the way you live and work?

**There are huge possibilities for tourism, education and professional training with this technology the possibilities are endless. We can only measure the success with better outcomes.**

Q9. What communications barriers have you experienced in expanding or operating your business or providing services, such as health or education? Have you been able to overcome these barriers and if so, how?

**Regional businesses have difficulty attracting younger visitors who expect to stay connected. The same applies to attracting younger employees – they cannot survive without good communications**

Q10. What communication functions (e.g. speed, mobility, reliability, data, etc) would best suit your needs, noting the limitations of each technology (e.g. mobile, wireless, satellite, fibre)?

**The critical factor is 'Mobile Coverage'. The next generation of consumers all have Smart phones that form part of their anatomy and DNA. We should not assume that lack of coverage will be accepted in the future as we transition from decades of the implementation to what are now seen as the 'digital natives'.**

Q11. Do we need to continue to guarantee the standard telephone service for all (or only some) consumers, and if so, to what extent?

**The standard phone service is no longer relevant. It is 'Mobile' coverage that is important.**

Q12. Are there new or other services, the availability of which should be underpinned by consumer safeguards?

**Mobile coverage allowing for phone, internet, direction finding, apps, culture interpretation, Maps, social media platforms, so it's basically MOBILE COVERAGE across the WHOLE of Australia.**

Q13. What standards should apply to your services? How might they best be enforced?

**We are 'one country' so the same standards need to be delivered for each tax paying resident.**