2015 Regional Telecommunications Review
Secretariat Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

9th July 2015

The Committee,

RE: Regional Telecommunication Review 2015

Ballarat ICT is pleased to submit their response to this year's Regional Telecommunications Review.

Ballarat ICT Ltd is a partnership of industry, government and educational institutions dedicated to sustaining and growing a globally competitive information, communication and technology (ICT) industry in Ballarat.

Ballarat ICT Ltd's mission is to lead and support Ballarat's ICT industry for the benefit of the community, to significantly enhance ICT research and innovation, to provide world class ICT infrastructure and to create high quality jobs within the region.

This submittion outlines Ballarat ICT Ltd's thoughts on the current status of telecommunication in regional Australia.

Regards,

Ian Fry
Executive Officer
Ballarat ICT Limited

Question

Q1. 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?

Regional Australians rely on their telecommunications as much as, if not more than metropolitan areas given the distances and in some areas isolation .The number one priority is for communication, whether it is for business, safety, health or social communication. Often there is only one or maybe two Telco's to supply both mobile and fixed line communications therefore the reliance on these telecommunication companies is extremely important. This reliance will grow as more business and social programmes such as health become more prevalent over mobile and data networks rather than just business and social communication as it has been. The ever increasing applications and social media will also add to the limited resources a lot of regional centres now have. Regional areas adopt to new technologies well. Due to the small number of suppliers and limitations in bandwidth, some regional areas cannot gain the maximum benefits of the latest technologies.

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

While the NBN service is currently meeting its performance expectations, the standard of installations at customer's premises and network infrastructure installation in the street is not always up to adequate standards.

NBN fixed wireless reports from our areas are mainly very positive in relation to speed and plans, the only drawback being the line of sight requirements of this service.

Satellite, although not really in our areas, the feedback I have received is that there is a lack of adequate allowance on the plans available due to satellite bandwidth limitations

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?

While some premises have FTH technology in our areas now and these will only increase, given the changes in the amount of data now being used by both consumers and business this may present problems with affordable download/upload plans available form ISP's in the near future. This will impact regional areas more than cities due to the limited number of potential customers available to the ISP's in these regional areas. Meaning, the number of ISP's who will offer their services in regional areas will be limited due to the lack of profitability from a small customer base. This will also limit the number of Telco's offering mobile solutions in regional areas due to infrastructure cost versus return on investment. HFC networks also exist in some of our areas operated by iinet. These services currently offer similar download speeds to NBN fibre but not equivalent upload speeds. From all reports, these networks are proving adequate at this stage. I am led to believe that upgrade paths are available in the future.

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?

Backhaul capacity issues sometimes cause delays in both fixed and mobile networks in our areas. With the increasing use of hand held devices and applications being used buy these devices the demand on the network is going to grow exceedingly fast. This rapid growth will highlight underlying issues with backhaul capacity and mobile spectrum capacity and availability. Backhaul capacity in mobile networks is somewhat less an issue in metro areas due to the availability of major fibre networks.

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?

All efforts should be made to ensure mobile coverage becomes available to the majority of the Australian population given the growth in this area. Should this not be viable, government subsidies may be required as well as the use of alternate technologies to ensure regional areas can operate on a level playing field both with business and social communications with those in Metro areas.

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

N/A

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

While not a co-investment, it may be feasible for NBN Co to consider purchasing the HFC networks in regional areas such as Ballarat, Mildura and Geelong. This would quickly result in the availability of broadband services to more regional people hasten the rollout and is in line with the HFC strategy of NBN Co.

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

The use of mobile apps and the capacity of the mobile networks will continue to transform the way we live and work. This is evident by the every growing use of hand held devices for both social and business purposes. The added mobility gives us access to services which were once only available in an office or home situation. Basic items such as email, documents, web etc. While many new apps give us access to eHealth and many other essential services.

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?

N/A

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

Fibre to the Premise is ultimately the best technology for our needs, while also requiring a 4G connection to a mobile network. While this is not always available, HFC and 3G networks in some cases are adequate.

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

I certainly agree that the restoration times of faulty phone and Data services has increased dramatically over the last 12 months and the level of service provided lacks in professionalism . Therefore we need to guarantee the standard telephone service for all consumers, but alter it to reflect the networks used eg. Mobile, fixed, wireless etc. There should be response times set for fault and outage restoration. These would require different levels and be overseen or deliberated on by an independent body. Penalties should apply should these standards should not be met.

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

See answer to question 11

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

Standard service restore times are needed for different levels of service for example business customers in regionals areas have less options for backup services and often none should their networks go off line. To ensure regional business are not disadvantaged it is essential that restoration times and if necessary compensation for lost connectivity/potential business are implemented.