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Gillebri Cotton (Moonrocks) Office

Submission RTIRC

To  secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

RTIRC Review Committee

Dear Committee,

I write to you with reference to your review into the adequacy of telecommunication services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia with direct reference to the township of St George, QLD and surrounding area.

I note that your terms of reference are if regional areas have equitable access to telecommunication services that are significant to those parts of Australia. I would respectfully raise that this is not the case.

The township and surrounding areas of St George are serviced by the Telstra signal, with limited coverage from Voderphone within the limits of the town. As the only telecommunication service provider the community relies heavily on the signal to conduct everyday business including internet access.

Earlier this year Telstra completed an upgrade of the service from 3G to 4G. Although the upgrade was appreciated Telstra did not inform the community of the upgrade. Over a course of 2 weeks phone and internet service was unusable with absolutely no warning. As the only provider this threw the entire community into chaos. This issue could be simply resolved by some clear communication such as our local energy provider (Ergon) provides when it is doing work on the electricity grid here.

As the only 'reliable' telecommunication signal in the area most internet access outside the town limits is via a wifi signal derived from the telecommunication signal. However there are a number of known black spots in the area where signal strength is simply unusable.

One of these known black spots is an area approximately 20km south of St George on the Carnarvon Highway. This area is one of the 'economic hubs' of the community containing a number of highly productive farming enterprises, service providers to the agriculture community, a cotton ginnery, and a national produce supplier to a retail chain. This black spot is well known to Telstra with numerous requests for assistance being raised over the years. The area has been logged as a known black spot with both Telstra and the Telecommunication Ombudsman and there was a concerted community effort to have it recognized, reported and fixed after the 2011 floods. None of these requests have been actioned on in an appropriate manner.

Telstra have attempted a band aid solution by selling affected businesses 'Smart Antennae's', a device which magnifies the signal over a small area. These devices have limited range and businesses are forced to purchase and install them at their own expense. These devices are not an appropriate

solution within an agriculture community as individuals are forced to drive to a 'hot spot' in order to make calls or connect to the internet.

The National Broadband Network has proven itself to be a poor solution to the issue of internet service in regional areas for this same reason. As connections are place specific they do not fill the requirements of agriculture based businesses.

Many companies are now in the position where they have combined a number of the above mentioned services to ensure some form of continual connectivity. Specifically most businesses use personal hotspot when in the paddock (if there is signal available), wifi in their offices boosted by the smart antennae and a satellite connection as backup for black spot locations / to minimize the disruption when the Telstra signal is disrupted.

I would suggest that few customers in urban Australia require three individual systems to ensure continual telecommunication and internet connectivity. As such there is clearly an issue in the St George region (and many parts of regional and rural Australia) when it comes to this subject.

In summary the St George region suffers from a poor telecommunication system, specifically in relation to the following.

- a) A single 'reliable' service provider means the entire telecommunication signal is tied to this provider.
- b) Poor community consultation in relation to down time of the network.
- c) Known black spots are not being addressed despite numerous requests.
- d) Current solutions are poor and do not reflect the needs of the customer.

It is my opinion that the solution to the issue is correcting the issues associated with the Telstra signal specifically eliminating black spots, improving consistency of signal and improved communication in relation to upgrade works.

Thank you for the oppourtunity to present this submission.

With Regards

Trevor Harch

Resident