

# Lake Eucumbene Chamber of Commerce (INC.)

ABN 34892 647 464 Incorporation number INC9880093

Website: [www.visitadaminaby.com.au/Lake-Eucumbene-Chamber-of-Commerce](http://www.visitadaminaby.com.au/Lake-Eucumbene-Chamber-of-Commerce)

## REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDEPENDENT REVIEW 2015

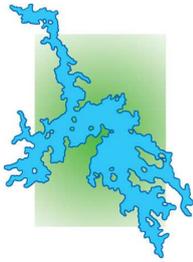
**Q1: Please complete the following information. This information will not be published:**

- a. Name: Lake Eucumbene Chamber of Commerce Inc. (LECC)
- b. Incorporation number INC9880093
- c. Contact : Secretary Jan Leckström
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g. Local Government areas:  
The LECC has members operating small businesses in the Snowy River and Cooma-Monaro Shires;
- h. The LECC supports member businesses in the northern part of the Snowy Mountains NSW:
  - i. Adaminaby;
  - ii. Anglers Reach,
  - iii. Old Adaminaby;
  - iv. Providence Portal;
  - v. Northern Lake Eucumbene area;
  - vi. Yaouk area;
  - vii. Shannons Flat.
- i. Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data:
  - i. Adaminaby
    - 1) Permanent residents 226;
    - 2) Privately owned dwellings 160;
    - 3) Number of families 60;
  - ii. Wider area
    - 1) Permanent residents 314;
    - 2) Privately owned dwellings 322;
    - 3) Number of families 67.

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**Q2: Chapter 1: How does demand for telecommunications services inform the Review:  
Please comment on how your reliance on telecommunications in regional Australia differs from urban areas.**

1. **Reliance:**

- a. Adaminaby and the area within a 10km radius:
  - i. Mobile phone services – this area receives a slower performing digital 3G signal.
  - ii. Internet ADSL1 via copper wire:
    1. The local exchange has delivered ADSL1 since mid 2006 which is becoming slower and now has reached its maximum capacity:
    2. Adaminaby businesses and locals within a 10km radius of the town have to access business services that have been reduced or removed in the last few years i.e. banking, online ordering for equipment, library services, research facilities and online training.
- b. The small villages of Old Adaminaby and Anglers Reach are dependent on satellite services for their telecommunication needs as are the localities of Yaouk, Shannons Flat and Providence Portal.
- c. Some residents utilise mobile broadband.
- d. Telecommunication services now deliver vital services and at a corporate or governmental level there is no differentiation made between rural or urban areas regarding the accessibility of information. This is inequitable when the delivery outcomes are not the same:
  - i. Most banking, much business training (via webinars), major business purchases, researching of information by tertiary students, education (including homework and distance education), and accessing health and welfare information are now done online;
  - ii. Local larger agricultural enterprises rely on telecommunication services for staff safety, OH&S compliance and the remote operation of equipment as economic efficiencies are essential in regional areas;
  - iii. The small retail, accommodation and local service sectors rely on telecommunication to provide rapid financial transactions and online booking facilities;
  - iv. Digital streaming services are intermittent and can only be used if standard definition is selected.
- e. Businesses and private citizens utilizing satellite or mobile broadband services have very limited access to many of the services described in (d) above. Satellite is slow. Mobile broadband download is very limited and expensive.

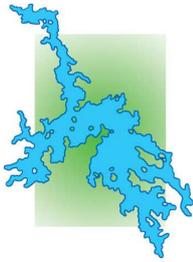
2. **Differences:**

- a. Geographically: This district differs from an urban one as it is 1100 – 1600m above sea level and has a mountainous terrain which poses special problems for telecommunications services;
- b. Locational: Our area is located close to Canberra: approx 80kms 'as the crow flies':

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- i. Is a 2 hour sealed highway drive away from the closest 4G services;
  - ii. Is separated from the ACT by the Brindabella Mountains and the Namadgi National Park;
- c. Adaminaby and the area within a 10km radius, receive a lesser performing 3G signal when compared to Cooma (pop. Approx 6,500 and 54 kms away), which has a better strength 3G. The closest 4G is in the ACT.
- d. The local exchange has delivered ADSL1 via copper wire since 2006, which is very slow and now at its maximum usage;
- e. In smaller regional areas such as this, a significant portion of the older population (over the age of approximately fifty) face particular challenges with access to digital services, as they have difficulty becoming computer literate because of:
  - i. Their age;
  - ii. Educational level;
  - iii. Lack of economic ability to afford digital equipment and
  - iv. Difficulty of accessing training.

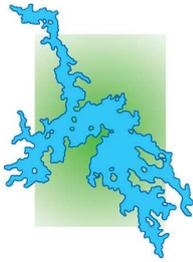
**Q3: Chapter 2: How are telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia delivered? Please comment on the delivery of services for example over fixed networks, mobile networks or satellite.**

- a. Almost 100% of mobile, fixed network and internet coverage in our regional area is delivered by Telstra;
- b. Countrytell has recently installed a fixed wireless line-of-sight broadband service in Adaminaby operating from a tower located on the eastern side of the town. Access to this service is easily prevented by any obstacle e.g. trees in the street;
- c. Other telecommunication companies, and thus their customers, only receive intermittent access. In terms of market competitiveness, this is not in line with current Federal Government policy.
- d. The planned NBN fixed wireless installation at Adaminaby will operate from a tower to be located on the western side of town. This will only benefit a limited number of residents living in the town and again provides line-of-sight service similar to that of Countrytell. This is not an all encompassing solution for our widespread population;
- e. LECC notes the improved services promised under the Mobile Black Spots Program and is especially pleased that the Anglers Reach community and, seemingly, most of Lake Eucumbene will receive mobile phone coverage;
- f. Current fixed network ADSL1 delivery on copper wire is slowing;
- g. Satellite provision:
  - i. To date has been inadequate for our area;
  - ii. Is expensive;
  - iii. There has been local outcry against perceived overcommitment of satellite services, resulting in poor service for subscribers;
- h. Mobile broadband is expensive and offers limited services: e.g. An LECC business member who runs an Internet dependent business 11 km from town has an inadequate 8MGB/month download limit for both business and family use.
- i. The LECC believes that the first priority for Mobile Coverage is safety:

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- i. There are still many sections of the Snowy Mountains Hwy which will not be covered once the first stage of the Federal Blackspot Program is complete. This area faces at least 3 more years of unreliable or absent mobile phone coverage on a winding mountain highway;
- ii. The Snowy Mountains Hwy is an unusually isolated main carriageway for SE Australia:
  1. There is only one town (Adaminaby) along the 145 km stretch from Cooma to Talbingo, and intermittent or no mobile coverage for much of the 188km from Cooma to Tumut;
  2. This winding mountain Highway is subject to the hazards of snow, ice, black ice, and plentiful 'roos and other wildlife;
  3. It is the only and thus very popular route for tourists who are unfamiliar with the high country roads and unprepared for poor mobile phone service.

#### **Q4: Chapter 3: How are services being used in regional, rural and remote Australia?**

**Please comment on how telecommunication services are being used for example, interacting with government, education, health or running a business.**

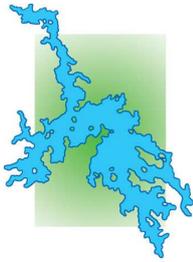
##### **Usage of telecommunications services:**

- a. All formats of telecommunication services now deliver vital services to this region and this usage has increased over the last three to four years. Poor telecommunication services are inequitable, have far reaching economic implications for remote regions and can even be life threatening (e.g. due to inability to contact emergency services) when the delivery outcomes are not the same;
  - i. Contacting people and disseminating information in emergency situations, e.g. bushfire situation updates. But this essential service is not available throughout our district.
  - ii. Alerting residents and visitors to this area about approaching severe weather conditions and/or road closures. A local teenager walked and ran over 20km at night, part of it in blizzard conditions, to get help after a car breakdown on a remote road without mobile coverage;
  - iii. Businesses and residents have to access most government and corporate services online, as happens in urban areas. The LECC was not able to access the recent forums run by the Department of Communications due to inadequate Internet provision;
  - iv. Educational delivery issues as limited/expensive downloads adversely affect children and teenagers in remote areas:
    1. Their study options are affected, particularly in the senior secondary and tertiary years;
    2. On the social side, isolated students home from boarding schools cannot contact their friends regularly;
- iv. Business training and support via the Internet is even more important for rural businesses than urban ones, as we have fewer opportunities for face to face training. Online training and discussion forums are not available with slow internet delivery;

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- v. Young people in rural areas cannot access social media as frequently as their city based friends. This can provoke unnecessary family disagreements, and sometimes unbudgeted expense: monthly download allocations are exceeded very easily when social media are used;
- b. The economy of this region has become more dependent on telecommunications services in the last few years. Future business growth has to be driven via improved telecommunications delivery:
  - i. Currently the situation is declining rural delivery opportunity vs. the expanding delivery available in urban areas;
  - ii. Currently the economy in this area is based on tourism and is seasonal i.e winter: snow; warmer months: fishing, bushwalking etc;
  - iii. To combat the variability of this economy and future disinvestment, instant delivery of telecommunications to consumers is a must;
  - iv. Younger adults, potential employees and entrepreneurs are moving away from rural areas. To stem this and improve future prosperity and welfare, delivery services have to be improved to restore business confidence;
  - v. For job creation and investment to be fostered, a technological solution to isolation is a must;
  - vi. Unreliable performance of existing telecommunications services in meeting fluctuating demands during peak tourism seasons, affects visitors'/customers' perceptions of the quality of their overall experiences in this area. Thus it damages the overall economy of the region, which relies on peak season tourism;
  - vii. During peak seasons, business operators also experience poor service at a time when their business demands are the greatest. Residents too experience poor service at these times. This variability should be addressed by service providers;
  - viii. Visitors/tourists to this area expect:
    - i. An equivalent phone and Internet service to that which they have in the major cities;
    - ii. Service delivery to be available from the telecommunication companies from which they purchase their services;
    - iii. Predominantly telecommunication services are provided by Telstra in our area which means some visitors to our area cannot access their accounts.
  - ix. Most visitors/tourists are wage earners or self-employed;
    - 1. They have to take pre-arranged holidays;
    - 2. They often have to keep in contact with work commitments whilst in this area;
    - 3. Thus mobile blackspots and slow Internet speeds affect the return visitor rate and thus the area's long-term economy.

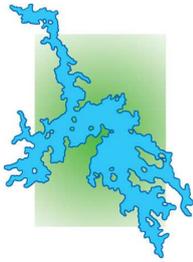
## **Q5: Chapter 4: Consumer safeguards**

**Please provide your views on current consumer safeguards and what should be considered in the future. There are two important aspects to be considered:**

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## 1. Safety:

The LECC believes that while mobile coverage is incomplete, landline services must be maintained at a fully functional and affordable level for the safety, social connections and business services to rural Australia.

## 2. Safeguards:

If our region is to grow economically, it will increasingly rely on digital telecommunications and e-commerce. A small and low income population in difficult terrain is never going to attract high quality service from commercial telecom providers. Therefore safeguards must be dealt with preemptively by legislation or other *effective* industry regulation.

Consumer rights, security of identity (privacy concerns) and assurance of continuing service standards as telecommunications usage grows, will also have to be addressed.

While fixed wireless technology is reliant on limiting the number of users, the wording of the NBN brochure supplied to Adaminaby appears to remove responsibility for policing that limit to the service providers themselves, and that document is far from reassuring.

## CONCLUSION:

With regard to the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia, the LECC sees significant potential for improvement with delivery to ensure the growth of innovative and attractive employment in rural communities. Locally based e-commerce and other Internet businesses, such as web design which do not rely on a 'shopfront' and high volumes of passing traffic for sales, offer significant economic benefits to small tourism or farming based communities. These businesses bring in income from outside the area and provide much needed permanent work which is not dependent on seasonal conditions. They can also offer flexible employment options to residents such as work-from-home. This reduces the need to travel long distances to larger regional centres such as Cooma. But this will only be possible if there is affordable, reliable Internet service with large download capacity.

Furthermore, equity of access is essential to diversify the market as currently Telstra is the primary deliverer of telecommunication services in regional and remote areas. This acts as a negative incentive for customers/consumers with significant links to other telecommunication companies, who come to this area even for a short period of time.

## General Comment on the Review

The LECC is concerned at the very short notice given for submissions, on matters which are the lifeblood of individuals and businesses in rural areas. June 24 - July 15 is mostly school holiday time, and our region relies on winter tourism. The Chamber also received no notice of this review until July 8. Hence our submission is briefer than we would have liked.

Jan Leckström  
Secretary,  
Lake Eucumbene Chamber of Commerce (Inc.)

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