

# *Pastoralists' Association*

*of West Darling Inc.*

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## Submission

05/07/2015

### Regional Telecommunications Review Submission

The Pastoralists' Association of West Darling (PAWD) is an agri-political lobby organization looking after the special interests of landholders in the Western Division of New South Wales. PAWD members and their businesses are principally involved in the production of wool, sheep, cattle and goats. These primary production businesses support and are supported by many remote and rural centres which provide health services, education facilities, labour, business supplies and services. With this in mind, the questions posed by the Review panel are answered on behalf of the PAWD members.

The Committee is seeking views on how the Australian Government and other levels of government, industry and the community can support access to telecommunications services that meet the needs of people living in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia. Key questions to consider:

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?

The PAWD believes its members' usage does differ from urban counterparts. Landholders rely solely on mobile communications (predominantly NGWL and satellite), as no form of hard wired communications exist. Therefore, entire businesses are reliant on the mobile

communication network. 100% of business electronic communication is carried out over currently (predominately) one unreliable, slow, expensive mobile network. Communication activities include but not limited to: verbal communication, video conferencing, emails, large file data transfer, welfare responsibilities (Worksafe requirements for employees'-always able to contact medical/emergency help) business advertising etc.

Businesses in urban areas also carry out the same electronic activities **but** have the luxury of ADSL which is much more reliable and significantly cheaper (\$0.00012/Mb for ADSL vs \$0.78/Mb on NGWL- a 6500 times cost difference on equivalent plans)(Source: <https://www.telstra.com.au/small-business> Online, Accessed:13/06/15). They have a reliable mobile network to compliment the cable connections. Having two systems gives businesses the luxury of redundancy-if one system fails, there is another to allow business activities to continue. PAWD members' businesses do not have this.

Because of the isolation, PAWD believes reliable communication is more important for isolated members than urban counterparts. When emergency services (police, fire, ambulance etc.) are required, they need to be contactable ASAP. It can take many hours travel to physically seek help in remote areas where as help is not far away in urban areas.

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

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?

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?

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?

Improve satellite phone reliability and coverage. Members who have and use satellite phones comment these phones don't always work and do take time to get a connection to allow a call to be made. Because of this unreliability, satellite phones are not able to be relied upon for used in an emergency. Instead UHF and HF radios are relied upon to communicate back to base for help or to confirm all is ok (welfare calls etc). A good example is the Wild Dog Destruction Board (WDDDB). The WDDDB has had to go to the expense of setting up its own HF radio network along the Dog Fence to ensure the welfare of its employees as satellite phones are too unreliable.

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

It needs to be recognised that the users of regional and remote towers are not limited to residents of that area, but travellers from urban areas too. Especially along highways, users would be predominately from away. Therefore costs need to be attributed accordingly.

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

Further government financial input into regional and remote areas-both state and federal is needed. Access to reliable electronic communication for regional and remote businesses at a cost comparable to urban counterparts is a basic essential and should be guaranteed by the government.

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

Open up regional and remote businesses to options of the many types of remote telemetry available-from site monitoring for security and safety to water point management for animal welfare.

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?

Poor communication channels mean services such as healthcare and education is limited. Members have to 'put up with it' despite the financial and social cost. Businesses cannot fully utilise services available online (such as Centrelink, Medicare etc.) because of slow internet connections and high data costs.

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)?

PAWD would like to see 100% wireless coverage for handheld devices along major highways. The towers providing this coverage would also have to be omnidirectional to encompass surrounding landholders.

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

With the privatisation of many services now, this is of the highest importance, especially for home and business base phones. With the absence of local calls for PAWD members, the retention of preferential and extended zone calls is also critical.

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

safeguards?

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

Telephone service providers should be bound by the Universal Service Obligation. This means rural and remote telephones and internet connections should be as reliable as the urban equivalents. When there is an equipment malfunction/breakdown, it should be repaired as quickly as possible, as in regional and remote areas, telephones are not only relied upon for business but also as the only available access to emergency assistance. Any complaints should be assessed and, if necessary, repair times should be enforced by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

*Yours Faithfully*  
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President