Federal Regional Telecommunications Review
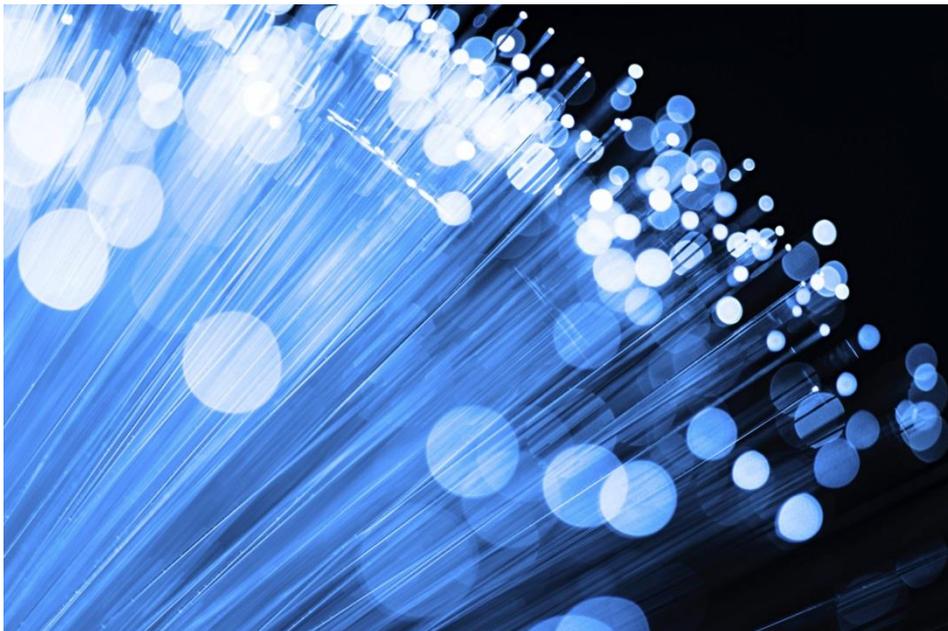
Submission: Regional Development Australia Yorke and Mid North

Regional Development **Australia**

YORKE AND MID NORTH

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?
Due to the rural nature of much of our region, reliance on telecommunication does differ from those in urban areas in a number of ways, including:

- Safety – With over 100 mobile blackspots already identified in the Yorke and Mid North region there are many areas that lack capability for streamlined communication that can impact individual and community safety from timely access to emergency services through to isolation. Our top 10 regional priority locations for mobile improvements include: Bute, Tickera, Rhynie / SevenHill township, Worlds End – Robertson, Booleroo- Murray Town to Wirrabara, Bangor to Melrose, Port Germein Gorge & Port Germein Road, Pekina Valley, Curramulka township (note that Curramulka is identified as a site that will be improved through the Federal Mobile Blackspot programme), Corny Point & Gleeson's Landing. These locations are across 6 LGA's within our region.

- Emergency Services – A major portion of our region includes farming districts, with some significant primary producing areas. Many of the agricultural farming properties are substantial in size and a lack of mobile coverage poses risks to those working on the land and or transporting to major port and storage hubs, particularly when injury occurs.
  The capacity for our emergency services to communicate between each other and or to alert community members is at times also inhibited by both mobile phone coverage issues and internet connectivity. In Banglor last year, 90% of the Wirrabara Forest in the southern Flinders Ranges was burnt, just a year after a fire in the Bundaleer Forest wiped out 30% of pine plantations. There were many risks for residents and emergency service workers unable to communicate during the fires.

- Competitiveness – Many of the wineries in the Clare Valley (Mid North part of region) do not have mobile coverage which impacts upon their day to day business operations. Both the agricultural and viticulture industries experience delays relating to varying aspects of their operations due to limited or no mobile coverage. Access to real time agricultural commodity prices for our farmers is inhibited by internet speed and drop-outs.
  Opportunities to have remote businesses or ability to work from home are restricted with nil / limited / slow telecommunication and internet access. Internet speed also limits to opportunities to have conference calls and use technology to its potential.

- Training and Education Opportunities – to access this information and reduce to need to attend in person and have the added costs and time of travel.
- Isolation caused by living in regional areas– telecommunication enables this disadvantage to be reduced.

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

The region is not connected.

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?

Of the 100+ mobile blackspots identified in our region, and of 11 sites in SA to gain improved mobile coverage, there are only 2 areas within the Yorke and Mid North region with confirmed scheduled improvements (approx. 1.8% improvement out of the regions identified blackspots). These two areas (Curramulka and Port Moorowie) are both located on the bottom half of the region on Yorke Peninsula. While we very much welcome these sites gaining improved mobile coverage, the majority of the regions blackspots are not identified for scheduled improvements.

In relation to internet connectivity, we do have black spots in the region whereby connections are weak and or slow. There are however, townships within the region, ie, particularly the major service townships including Port Pirie, Kadina and the like that experience a relatively good standard internet connectivity through ADSL services in particular.

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?

Yes.

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?

Population numbers to an extent, however, some areas with limited or no mobile coverage are sparsely populated but contribute greatly to the regions / state economy & productivity, ie, wine makers in parts of the Clare Valley region and grain growers on Yorke Peninsula. These areas are also transiently 'populated' / utilised by tourists and Freight / transport operators.

A risk matrix / assessment of particular locations relating to a range of potential risk factors would be of benefit. One of the criteria used by the government / Dept of Communications to assess submissions was the nomination of a location by an eligible MP. While many MP's are aware of mobile black spots in their region, the sites they nominate, from our understanding, aren't guided by particular principles or criteria to support one site over another. A risk assessment relating to a range of considerations including the following may be worth considering in future site determination:

- Safety risks (relating to injury / emergency access / crash data)
- Productivity / Competitive risks (eg, if lack of internet access affects a business or sectors capacity to access information / customers and compete in an equal manner as its competitors
- Bushfire prone areas

Other factors such as tourist numbers could also be considered, ie locations that don't have a significant permanent population may have high visitor numbers. In addition, regional access to training, education and health services should also be considered.

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

Although we wouldn't like to speak on their behalf, we would assume mobile network operators (MNO's) would be keen to attract and retain increased customer numbers. This is a challenge in regional areas however, as the population numbers matched against the level of investment to provide / improve coverage doesn't necessarily make it viable for MNO's.

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

Utilisation of existing infrastructure and or local Council / Crown land contributions.

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

Improved video for live online face to face meetings would be utilised more and improve productivity, particularly by savings made through less travel time.

Improved / Increased use of video conferencing for health related / Specialist follow up appointments with regional patients would provide welcome relief for country patients, removing travel time, travel costs, etc.

Education and training opportunities from schools, business and personal use. Provide the opportunity to live and work remotely – increase the population and attraction of living in the region. Also access to services, eg counselling for mental health etc, where demand is high in several of our parts of our region with limited services available.

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?

Irregular speed of internet impacts many regional businesses. Anecdotally, many businesses state a slowing of the internet at approx. 3.30pm on weekdays which by locals is reported to be caused by school students arriving home from school on mass, and engaging in internet use.

An example of communication barriers includes a Linguistics Translator Consultant who was trying to Skype from Eudunda (one of our regional townships), however the speed of internet was too slow and the pixel of the coverage wouldn't allow this to occur effectively. Therefore for this person to continue working they then had to commute to Adelaide (cost and time) plus then had to find care for children as away due to travel (another cost / social barrier). These costs often outweigh the cost of working and provide more social restrictions.

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)?

Speed, mobility and reliability are especially important.

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

At this stage, yes.

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

Collaborative applications and cloud-based service should most certainly be underpinned with consumer safeguards.

Contact Details

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