

About the Shire

Wingecarribee Shire Council, located in the Southern Highlands of NSW is approximately 1.5 hours southwest of Sydney along the Sydney/Canberra corridor.

The Shire has a population of 46,308 people and covers an area of 2,700 square kilometres. The Shire is located at or above 640 metres above sea level. The main towns include Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale with smaller villages including Berrima, Bundanoon, Colo Vale, Hill Top and Robertson.

Wingecarribee Shire is identified by the NSW State Government as one of the fastest growing Local Government Area's, with an anticipated 16% population increase and target of 9000 new jobs by 2031. It is a highly desirable tourist destination with over 1,300,000 visitors a year



Key questions

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?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Council believes people in regional Australia rely much more heavily on telecommunications than those in urban areas

Emergency responders already take longer to respond due to distance and availability. Fast response and richer responses (telemedicine, data rich 000) have the potential for significantly improved outcomes for regional people.

Negotiations for social service, business and health are vital due to distance from these services.

The increasing delivery of online service provision by all levels of Government (ATO - My.Gov, Service NSW and Council) provides some welcome levelling of service provision for regional and remote people.

All of these require effective and affordable broadband communication services.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Small areas of the Shire are connected to the NBN in new housing estates. The Shire is now on the NBN rollout plan. Council, business and residents are keenly anticipating the NBN although the rollout for our smaller villages is unclear.

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?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Council will rely heavily on wireless technology as well as the capacity of the backhaul to adequately service the demands.

There is very little accessible fibre in the Shire, because of this Council established its own licensed microwave data network to provide effective communications between our sites. This carries both voice and data and has proved robust and reliable.

Council has provided several free Wi-Fi Hotspots – in and outside our Libraries with assistance from NSW Government, in and outside our Civic Centre, in and outside our Tourism Centre and in our main central park, Corbett Gardens. The free Wi-Fi has been reliable however Council provides this "As-is" with no guarantee of service level.

Where services are provided, consideration of the service level will need to be negotiated.

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?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

With the growing popularity of smartphones and other mobile broadband devices Council has noticed significant degradation of speed that appears to be backhaul related. Our primary carrier is Telstra.

Council notes that several infrastructure providers have private fibre networks, some State owned and taxpayer funded that could be “unlocked” to improve a richer backhaul capacity to regional areas.

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?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Changing the Universal Service Obligations for fixed telephone services to provide telecommunications coverage would be a welcome initiative. Telecommunications is then a broader term, not limited to fixed services.

Amending the USO to include data communications as well as voice communications should be included in this.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Not applicable to Council. However, as noted in our response to Question 4, several infrastructure providers have private fibre networks, some State owned and taxpayer funded that could be “unlocked” to improve a richer backhaul capacity to regional areas.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

As part of the Mobile black spot programme, Council would consider the use of its assets such as water towers for erection of telecommunication infrastructure.

Council already owns towers on Mount Gibraltar, Oxleys Hill and Bullio that are used for internal communications, both traditional two-way radio and data communications. Further the towers on Oxleys Hill and Mount Gibraltar are used for commercial tenants.

Council would pass on the observation that co-investment and management is challenging given the small number of experts in the field and the conflicts of interest that can arise.

Council is always willing to explore agreements that provide better service for our residents.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Council believes mobile broadband enables digital government and this will transform the way we interact with government in ways that are still to be imagined. They will only come to fruition when the infrastructure is in place.

Council believes mobile networks will become the first point of contact for most transactions with Government and to that end has rebranded the Council website to our "Online Customer Service Centre" and has made the website responsive to cater for mobile devices. The website is www.wsc.nsw.gov.au

The capacity for telemedicine is still in its infancy.

The capacity for remote working is still in its infancy.

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?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Slow data networks impede our service delivery. Big Data is creating a volume, velocity and variety of data that requires high speed connections to service. From a mobile device a constituent may want to view a high definition map, or view an information video. This is not practical in many areas.

For Council to operate its business efficiently, access to our corporate resources from either our own data centre or Software as a Service Cloud solution is an essential requirement. Because of the poor data speeds once outside of our three main towns this is not possible. Our Certifiers, Engineers and inspectors rely on taking out paper copies and hand writing, which then creates delays, loss of integrity, duplication and errors.

At the provider end, we can focus on optimising our data, however, as more people use the digital services, the capacity needs to increase.

Overcoming the barriers by workarounds is a poor system engineering solution. Removing the barriers by improving the overall data communication services is Council's preferred position.

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)?

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

We believe a mix of communication functions will deliver the richest experience for our Shire. The availability of sufficient backhaul is the critical component. We have found microwave reliable and easy to upgrade progressively through licences, TX/RX upgrades and finally dish upgrades. If microwave can be installed at a speed of X, but over time and

with more licensing can deliver 10x, we suggest it is better to start at X to leave headroom and expansion.

Our experience with satellite has been very poor with slow speed and unacceptable latency for our purposes.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

We believe the USO should be modified to reflect a guarantee of a connection service whether it be VOIP, satellite, microwave, NBN.

Council also believes the 000 service needs to be enhanced to enable the capabilities of smart devices to be integrated into the 000 service. The current Emergency + app (which Council promotes and believes is a great innovation) relies on the phone holder to read out the geo-location the phone GPS provides. Being able automatically to pass geo-location information to first responders would provide tremendous outcome benefits for remote areas. It would also remove the need for fixed line 000 locations and the challenges of 000 from a VOIP service.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Council does not make a submission to this question.

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

Wingecarribee Shire Council's response

Council does not make a submission to this question.