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RTIRC Secretariat  
GPO Box 2154  
Canberra ACT 2601

## Submission Regional Telecommunications Review

As the Federal Member for Parkes I welcome the opportunity to express my views on Regional Telecommunications, and to bring to the committee's attention the continuing need for improvement in rural and regional New South Wales (NSW).

The Parkes Electorate covers approximately 256 643 sq km, from the NSW- Queensland border to Ilford in the East, Lake Cargelligo in the South, and Wanaaring in the West. Within the Electorate the current telecommunications standards vary throughout areas classified as Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote.

I continue to receive an average of three complaints regarding telecommunications every week, and telecommunication services are a major concern of my constituents. There are several 'blackspots' across the electorate that currently receive no mobile phone reception at all, such as the locality of Goolma between Mudgee and Dubbo. Many of the complaints that my office receives involve service faults, poor internet services, poor customer service and landline connections that are unreliable and out-dated.

I also receive many complaints from constituents that when they try to register their telecommunications problems with a service provider, this is often done through an outsourced call centre that has little understanding of regional Australia and their circumstances.

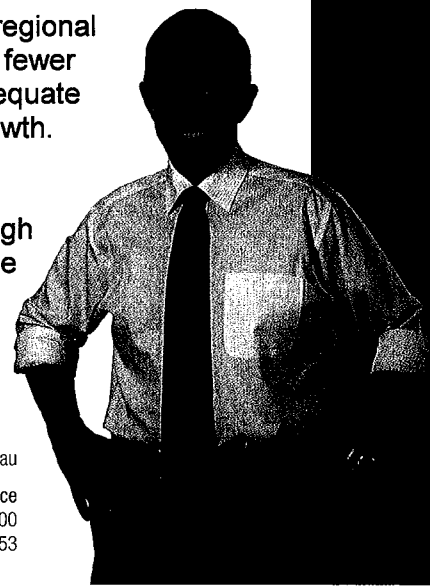
### **The Digital Economy**

The potential economic benefits that fast broadband services can provide to businesses in regional Australia may go some way to addressing the imbalance that distance creates. As Australia's population continues to rise, the prospective growth in regional areas should not be undervalued. This growth is in part dependent on improving the telecommunications services available in regional Australia, which will ensure the ability of regional businesses to be competitive with those accessing metropolitan services.

As I am sure the committee is aware, a lower proportion of businesses in regional Australia have a web presence, fewer customers have access online, and fewer transactions take place over the web. Providing regional Australia with adequate access to services at sufficient speeds has a great potential for driving growth.

### **Health and Education**

There are a lot of possibilities of improving access to health services through telecommunications, such as teleconferencing with specialists not available locally; however this needs to be considered within the current telecommunications framework. If patients can't ring up to make an



appointment because they have continual problems with their landline, or they are unable to reschedule an appointment from their mobile phone, constituents in the Parkes Electorate clearly do not have adequate or equitable access to telecommunication services.

Education services delivered through telecommunications services in the Parkes Electorate depend on reliable and affordable internet services that are supplied at satisfactory speeds. While the majority of the schools in my electorate have adequate internet services, for households that are isolated, in remote areas, and even some in the inner regional parts of my electorate internet services are not at a comparable standard available to those in metro areas for effective online learning.

One area that I would particularly like to bring to the committee's attention is the potential of organisations like the Men's Sheds that are spread right across my electorate. Several Men's Sheds have set up small computer labs to further education on internet use for members. However organisations such as these are not able to run without funding support and are just one example of how improved services will benefit regional communities. Men's Sheds focus on the benefits brought to a community through social interaction and these benefits could be greatly extended through access to satisfactory internet services.

Investment in telecommunications would greatly improve the health services and educational opportunities available to regional Australians. When considering service delivery, it is important that acceptable standards of telecommunications are universally available across regional Australia.

### **Indigenous**

There are significant populations of aboriginal people throughout the Parkes Electorate. Access by aboriginal people to telecommunications services is especially low in remote areas, due to service availability, affordability and education. Addressing these three areas would go some way to ensuring that other government and private sector services were also available, and easily accessible to these isolated communities. The low level of access has in some cases been exacerbated by the removal of pay phones in remote locations, where mobile services are unreliable, or inaccessible.

### **Adequate and equitable access**

Further investment is clearly needed to provide regional Australians with adequate and equitable access to telecommunications services. It is necessary to acknowledge and address the problems with blackspots across regional Australia, and ensure access to satisfactory internet speeds at affordable prices. This greatly needed infrastructure will provide many benefits to regional Australia.

I thank you for this opportunity to represent the people of the Parkes Electorate and I look forward to seeing the recommendations of this inquiry and subsequent action taken by the Government.

Kind Regards



Mark Coulton MP  
Federal Member for Parkes

