

Submission to 2011–12 Regional Telecommunications Review

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My Background

I am a farmer and a Director of a local Australian IT company reselling specialised Tendering/Bidding and Data Room software to the top 1000 companies worldwide.

As I do online demonstrations of this software to global clients, it is imperative that good IT infrastructure and bandwidth from that infrastructure is available at all times. It is from this perspective that I respond to your review.

Question 2. What is needed to extend and accelerate the role of telecommunications services and ICT in delivering benefits to regional economies?

There are a number of issues that inhibited the role of telecommunications services and ITC to regional areas in general as the focus of the NBN/Wireless services have been purely based around the major regional service centres, i.e. Tamworth, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga etc. However, there are other larger towns of 2000+ residents where the current government deployments are not being considered. These towns are vibrant and in some cases it is where the innovations are coming from. However it is these towns where the communication is highly lacking and limiting developments due to the lack of IT infrastructure, that being bandwidth.

This review needs to consider a “Hub-and-Spoke” infrastructure network out from these major regional centres. Most Telephone exchanges currently have fibre to these exchanges. Fibre to each home is not possible in these smaller townships and farms, but providing a network of broadband wireless data that has a far greater range than currently would overcome many issues experienced by regional and more isolated consumers.

Question 5. What are some examples of what you want to see happen to encourage greater participation in the digital economy by people living and working in regional Australia?

Smaller regional townships due to their isolation (primary distance) do not have the opportunity to participate fully due to the lack of knowledge and training. The government needs to be with the community as they deploy; and institute training to the middle aged and seniors in these communities as to the types of services available via the internet,

whether it is government or commercial at a subsidised programme; finances being the limiting factor to this sector.

Question 6. What are the main barriers to regional communities increasing their use of information and communications technologies and do you have any ideas for ways in which regional communities could progressively overcome these barriers?

Smaller towns outside regional centres almost exclusively do not receive the bandwidth at a reasonable price to perform in the digital economy. When they do it is unreliable at best. A classic example is broadband wireless (3G) provided by Telstra (as they have the only reliable service in country areas outside towns other than satellite) can be reasonable at certain times of the day, but especially after school (3.0pm – 10pm) the service becomes impossible to use, particularly if you are a business trying to operate across all global time-zones.

Telstra will only allow satellite when the NextG network is not available or unreliable. My experience with satellite is that it suffers the same bandwidth problems at certain times of the day which limits the ability to operate effectively globally.

Question 13. Have you been able to readily obtain information to improve your mobile phone coverage, such as using an external antenna or choosing particular phones that are better suited to rural or remote coverage?

Currently I am a user of the Telstra NextG service with an external aerial and even with this aerial I'm at the limit of the 3G tower range. The issue is that there are not enough 3G towers or the bandwidth to handle the traffic through them. As a community becomes engaged (particularly the youth) to the broadband service the rate of uptake and usage is exponential. So the service becomes unusable to a business in peak periods and this is a major inhibitor to doing business.