

Submission for 2011-2012 Regional Telecommunications Review

The Shire of Mt Marshall is located 273 kilometres from Perth in the North Eastern Wheatbelt of Western Australia. The population of the community is 653 (2010 figure from Australian Bureau of Statistics) with people spread across the two localities of Beacon and Bencubbin.

The Shire of Mt Marshall covers 10,134 square kilometres. Grain production, sheep, cattle and pigs are the main industries within the community. All other local businesses are reliant on these industries to sustain the community's economic standing.

Telecommunication networks within our region would fairly be assessed as average to below average. The level of services provided impact fundamentally on Emergency Services, Education and Health and also has a substantial impact on local businesses and residents.

The delivery of education to adults and children is affected by telecommunications. Many adults rely on external / online study programs offered by training providers and universities. Poor and intermittent internet connection interferes with student study and exam requirements.

Primary School Teachers at Beacon have outlined that poor mobile reception poses a risk to teachers, parents and students. The Italian teacher at the school travels from another shire and is often out of mobile range. The poor signal also affects the response time for emergencies that occur at the school as emergency service volunteers need to be within mobile range to be contacted.

The internet connection is also problematic. Connection is obtainable the majority of time but it is significantly slow. Web pages often time out before they have loaded and this causes issues when using smart boards to teach speciality subjects such as language and geography to students. Interactive boards bring a whole new innovative level of interactivity to the classroom, currently both Beacon and Bencubbin are limited in their utilisation of this technology.

Mr Murray, Beacon Primary School Principal has stated that web requests undertaken by his students to look up video clips for example only delivers a 50% chance of successfully viewing the clip as the majority of time it is buffering, this also affects clips on the ABC's and BTN websites. "The bottom line is we can't really use the internet as a teaching tool apart from going to static pages. Anything with a video clip is a waste of time." says Mr Murray.

Mrs Jenny Hogan, Teacher at Bencubbin Primary School has concerns with the implementation of the National Curriculum, Online Teaching Learning System in 2012. This system encourages online interaction with teachers and students. Some students within the district do not have access to the internet and with intermittent connection at the school there is no guarantee of the internet being accessible on school premises.

Emergency services within our region rely on a two way radio system when they are on “the ground” in an emergency situation, however this system does not allow for volunteers and co-ordinators to liaise with the broader emergency services community i.e. FESA Communications and RFDS. The lack of reliable mobile signal affects broader communication and response time of volunteers. Please refer to *attachment 1* for further details relating to Emergency Services.

Silver Chain offers a comprehensive health service to both Beacon and Bencubbin. Our communities rely heavily on the remote nursing staff as their first point of contact for health care. Lack of mobile coverage has a major effect on the delivery of medical treatment to patients, staff training, response time for emergencies and communications with other medical professionals. Please see *attachment 2* for further details.

Little or no improvements to telecommunication in our region will see our population quickly lose touch with advancements within the technological world especially with changes in user behaviour and preference towards the use of mobile phones and internet becoming more prevalent. With changes occurring in traditional sectors such as farming and local government procedures lack of access will have significant impacts on the economic development of our Shire. Farmers now have the ability to market their own grain; this is a significant advancement for the industry. This improvement puts farmers within our district at a severe disadvantage to those in large regional districts as farmers cannot access the internet remotely consistently.

Mobile phone and broadband devices are becoming increasingly popular within the Shire of Mt Marshall. The need to connect to the internet remotely for business and personal use, including social networking, has increased but is limited for our residents due to the lack of coverage. Smart phones are the phones of the future for both personal and business use, unfortunately utilising their full capabilities is limited within the district, again due to poor or no signal. The Shire of Mt Marshall is committed and actively pursuing the economic growth of the Shire, limitations within the telecommunications networks inhibits on that growth especially when trying to attract tradesperson from larger regional centres.

Commonly found by consumers within the region is the lack of understanding from telecommunication providers and their sales team. Regularly consumers are sold mobile phones, and more commonly broadband devices that simply do not work. Consumers are reassured by sales persons that the mechanism will work and ultimately purchase something that is not suited to their requirements. Although provider's offer a return policy, the consumer is inconvenienced and extra administration costs are incurred ensuring all goods are credited.

To ensure a sustainable future for the Mt Marshall region, we believe that the above issues need to be addressed as they significantly affect the growth within our local economy, business efficiencies and government services.

Health and Education are becoming more reliant on modern telecommunication systems. To ensure that these professions maintain a high level of service and continue to stay up to date with the metro centres it is imperative that telecommunication services become more reliable.

Attachment 1 – Letter from Jack Walker, Bush Fire Control Officer



Shire of Mt Marshall

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IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE: JW11-367 FILE: A6/6
ENQUIRIES TO: Mr Jack Walker

2 December 2011

Mr Matthew Gilfellow
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Mt Marshall
PO Box 20
BENCUBBIN WA 6477

Dear Matthew

RE: Mobile Telephone coverage – Shire of Mt Marshall

As a representative on the Shire of Mt Marshall Local Emergency Management Committee, a volunteer Ambulance Officer and a volunteer fire fighter with the Bencubbin Volunteer Bush Fire brigade, I would like to submit a letter of support to the Shire of Mt Marshall to assist it in its efforts to improve the mobile phone coverage in the area.

Although mobile phones are not the main form of communications on the fire ground, they are an important tool in the initial call out procedure to inform members that they are required to attend an incident. Unfortunately, in the country, volunteer fire fighters are made up of all occupations and are scattered throughout the community and not sitting around a fire station waiting for a call out.

Communications on the fire ground are generally conducted through a reliable two way radio system, but it is also necessary to have a reliable mobile phone coverage in the event that the Incident Controller or members of his management team have to make contact with other agencies outside the two way radio coverage area, in particular FESA Communications Centre which is based in Perth.

As with the Bush Fire brigades the Ambulance service also depends on a reliable mobile phone coverage for call outs as volunteers are community members and could be participating in sporting events or attending other functions.

Emergency Services in the country rely on an efficient call out system and at the present moment the lack of a reliable mobile phone service in Bencubbin reduces the response time of volunteers.

Council has this year started sending harvest ban information using SMS, and I know that in some instances it can take up to half an hour or more before the message is received. Some farmers don't receive them until after the ban has been lifted.

Hopefully this letter will be of assistance in your endeavours to improve the mobile phone coverage in the area.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned on 96851202.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jack Walker'.

Jack Walker
Bush Fire Control Officer
Shire of Mt Marshall



7th December 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to support the Shire of Mt Marshall's submission for the review of telccommunications.

My position as the Remote Area Nurse providing an emergency and primary health service within the Shire is greatly impacted with having no reliable mobile service in this community. I am only able to be contacted by a landline telephone service. This increases issues associated with my family privacy and my security when called after clinic hours.

Our clinic landline is diverted to Healthdirect after clinic hours; this is a Health Department directive. The only means of communicating with the clinic staff members that Healthdirect has is through private landline phones.

When called to emergencies by Healthdirect, ambulance volunteer staff or the hospital, there is no mobile service in the client's homes within the town site of Bencubbin and limited or no services in parts of the shire if attending an accident. This impacts on communications with other health professionals including the nearest doctor or the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS).

Silver Chain has purchased a satellite phone to try to overcome some of these issues. These phones also have limited service and do not work inside buildings, moving vehicles and in overcast weather.

All Silver Chain Remote Health Centres have Polycom phones for staff teleconferences and management meetings. Beacon and Bencubbin are the only two centres in the state where there is no service, once again having to rely on the landline service.

The limited access to telecommunications in our area places staff, volunteers and clients within our region at risk, which could be life or death.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K. M. Sachse'.

Karolyn Sachse
Remote Area Nurse
Bencubbin Silver Chain Health Centre

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