

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications GPO Box 594, CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au

Re Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the request for feedback on the Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 Grant Opportunity Draft Guidelines.

The Kimberley Regional Group (KRG) is an alliance of the four Shires of the Kimberley, being the Shire of Broome, the Shire of Derby West Kimberley, the Shire of Halls Creek and the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley. Collaboratively the group seeks to support outcomes for the region through improved social, economic and cultural outcomes.

Digital connectivity remains of vital importance to regional and remote communities and is critical infrastructure to ensure that businesses, education and family opportunities achieve parity with those available in metropolitan regions. To provide this feedback, we reviewed digital matters identified by the KRG and assessed them against the guidelines, noting that some of the items are not the target of this grant funding. Key issues include:

- Proximity to NBN fibre cable but no reticulation.
- Emergency Management
- Proprietary digital infrastructure requiring more than one mobile phone account.
- Digital reliability including seasonal digital load.

Proximity to NBN fibre but no reticulation.

The requirement to be "outside the NBN fixed line footprint" needs clarification. There is a key issue that the NBN runs past towns such as Halls Creek & Fitzroy Crossing which have some of the lowest socio-economic outcomes and very poor school attendance. In the Shire of Halls Creek there has been negotiations with NBN and third parties to plan a solution to reticulate the fibre that would not have been undertaken otherwise. Grant funding can be part of the solution in some of these remote locations. Another example is the East Kimberley Regional Airport which has fibre optic cable running past however cannot access NBN as the airport is just outside the town boundary.

The need to avoid infrastructure duplication is recognised but a clearer understanding of the definition of the "footprint" will be required to avoid unintended consequences in the attraction and consideration of applications. It would be useful to add the definition of the NBN fixed line footprint to the Glossary to clarify whether this is the existing NBN footprint, locations where there is an NBN fibre optic cable and/or locations where the NBN footprint is planned.

Emergency Management.

The document predominantly refers to economic benefits and social benefits, including in the criteria however, page 9 in a slightly different context, refers to economic, social or public safety significance. Public safety is a very important consideration, particularly in the event of an emergency such as vehicle crashes, bushfires or other "events" and has both economic and social value however is only listed under Merit Criteria 2 – social value and could arguably be included in both or as a separate merit criteria.

Proprietary digital infrastructure requiring more than one mobile account.

There is a significant issue in the north where infrastructure in remote locations can be either exclusively Telstra or exclusively Optus with some locals needing two phone contracts – one within their community and one when they are visiting relatives, shopping or attending a medical appointment. This is a safety, social and economic barrier often impacting on some of the poorest people in Australia. Going forward, universal access should be part of the requirements where the infrastructure is to service the community.

Digital reliability

It is pleasing that 2.3.1 recognises seasonal congestion and backhaul capacity for mobile coverage and broadband. Whilst the exclusion of the NBN footprint will not improve access in tourist towns such as Broome, which can see a five-fold increase in the town's population in peak season, it will be helpful to some.

It is hoped that these comments are of use in your review process. We look forward to the opening of the application process and encourage you to remain in contact so that Shires can promote the opportunity across the region.

