



## AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

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31 July 2024

Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee  
Regional Connectivity Branch  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
Canberra ACT 2601

By online submission portal

Dear Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee,

### **RE: 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review**

AgForce is a peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain and sheep, wool & goat producers. The cane, beef, broadacre cropping and sheep, wool & goat industries in Queensland generated around \$10.4 billion in on-farm value of production in 2021-22. AgForce is the leading voice for Queensland producers and strives to ensure the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Over 6,000 farmers, individuals and businesses provide support to AgForce through membership. Our members own and manage around 55 million hectares, or a third of the state's land area. Queensland producers provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, contribute significantly to the social fabric of regional, rural and remote communities, as well as deliver stewardship of the state's natural environment.

We thank the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee for their efforts to help deliver better communications to the bush.

Queensland has a unique telecommunication landscape with vast geographical distances, extreme weather and dispersed population. Those who live in sparsely populated remote areas rely solely on connectivity to access basic services like healthcare, education, business and emergency. It is this remoteness that drives the critical importance of telecommunications infrastructure.

AgForce would like to see further investment in communication infrastructure. This includes mobile tower capacity upgrades, redundancy power systems for infrastructure and individual premises and exploring further terrestrial solutions.

AgForce strongly supports the submissions completed by National Farmers Federation and Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia (BIRRR), as AgForce endorses the same principles and strives for the same outcomes of better connectivity in the bush.

AgForce would like to add the following points:

1. Voice prioritisation needs to be mandatory for mobile and satellite telecommunication solutions. Phone calls should always be made a priority over streaming.
2. We implore the Government to review and legislate against the sales incentives available to Telco's staff. These sales incentives do not deliver end user benefits and often result in people being sold incorrect or inappropriate products that do not suit circumstances, in efforts to meet an individual's sales targets and commission structures. AgForce is supportive of the ACCC's recommendations regarding the draft Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code which is currently being reviewed.
3. Mandated community engagement by the Telco's is imperative to ensure that regional solutions are delivered. Local communities are the best to determine what they require, and this engagement should continue through to the post audit of projects. Regional telecommunications are not a one size fits all.
4. All new technologies which will replace major communication sources (i.e. landline replacement, internet type replacement) should be required to go through processes that ensures robust trialling and reporting before being implemented. AgForce calls for a set standard of procedural guidelines outlining the targets to be shown by trials before implementation should be put in place. These trials need to be done in adequate numbers and varying situations to show true performance before being adopted. To determine what is "adequate", a clear definition should be agreed upon.
5. Community stakeholder groups, including rural, regional and remote communications groups, should be included in Government committee discussions, to offer information on the unique challenges in the areas they live and work so that a true understanding of how communications is working on the ground in these areas is captured.
6. Consumers in the bush need to be protected from the continual migration of services. Those in remote locations tend to be migrated through different technologies more often than their urban counterparts. These continual changes and transitions are confusing and stressful. There are not sufficient protections in place for these consumers and there is a lack of support and safety for these migrations. Migration processes need to be strengthened, enhanced and enforced to reflect the critical nature of telecommunications in today's world.
7. Consumers need to be made more aware of their rights, as well as the connectivity services and solutions that are available to them. AgForce encourages greater funding for the Regional Tech Hub so it can expand its support services.

Overall, AgForce sees great relevance of the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee process and was encouraged to see engagement in remote and rural locations across Queensland. For future reviews however, we would strongly endorse even greater engagement across Queensland, so the Committee have further insights and understanding of the connectivity requirements agriculture and rural communities need to thrive.

Yours Sincerely,



  
Chief Executive Officer