Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper
Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

Name of respondent:	[redacted]
Name of organisation:	Ararat Rural City
Phone:	[redacted]
Email:	[redacted]
Website (if applicable):	N/A
Date:	28 February 2014

Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? **Yes** ☐ **No X** ☐

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.

ARARAT RURAL CITY COUNCIL

Mobile Coverage Programme

Submission by Ararat Rural City Council

ARCC

2014

ARARAT RURAL CITY PO BOX 246, ARARAT, VICTORIA, 3377

Overview

This document has been prepared by the Ararat Rural City Council in response to a call for submissions on a Discussion Paper on the Mobile Coverage Programme produced by the Department of Communications.

The document has been prepared after undertaking community consultation and undertaking a survey of businesses with Ararat Rural City. The results of the survey indicate that there is a strong perception in the community that mobile phone and mobile internet coverage in Ararat Rural City is substandard;

- Is significantly affecting business, and economic output. and
- Have significant repercussions for safety, and community cohesiveness in rural and remote areas.

Key Findings

- The online survey received a response rate of 37%.
- The number and location of survey responses correlated with the population distribution within Ararat Rural City.
- Although Telstra was perceived by many residents to be the best carrier for reliability for mobile communications, a number of respondents identified black spots in the Telstra Coverage.
- Apart from Telstra and Optus the coverage provided by other carriers was very poor.
- 22% of respondents were unhappy with coverage within Ararat Township.
- 27% of respondents were unhappy with mobile coverage outside of Ararat township.
- 17% or respondents have to use satellite internet to be able to conduct their businesses within Ararat Rural city.
- 63% of respondents indicated that they see internet connection as an absolute necessity to run their business.
- 62% of respondents indicated that they see mobile phones as an absolute necessity to run their business.
- 49% or respondents indicated that improved internet would significantly improve their business.
- 46% or respondents indicated that improved mobile would significantly improve their business.

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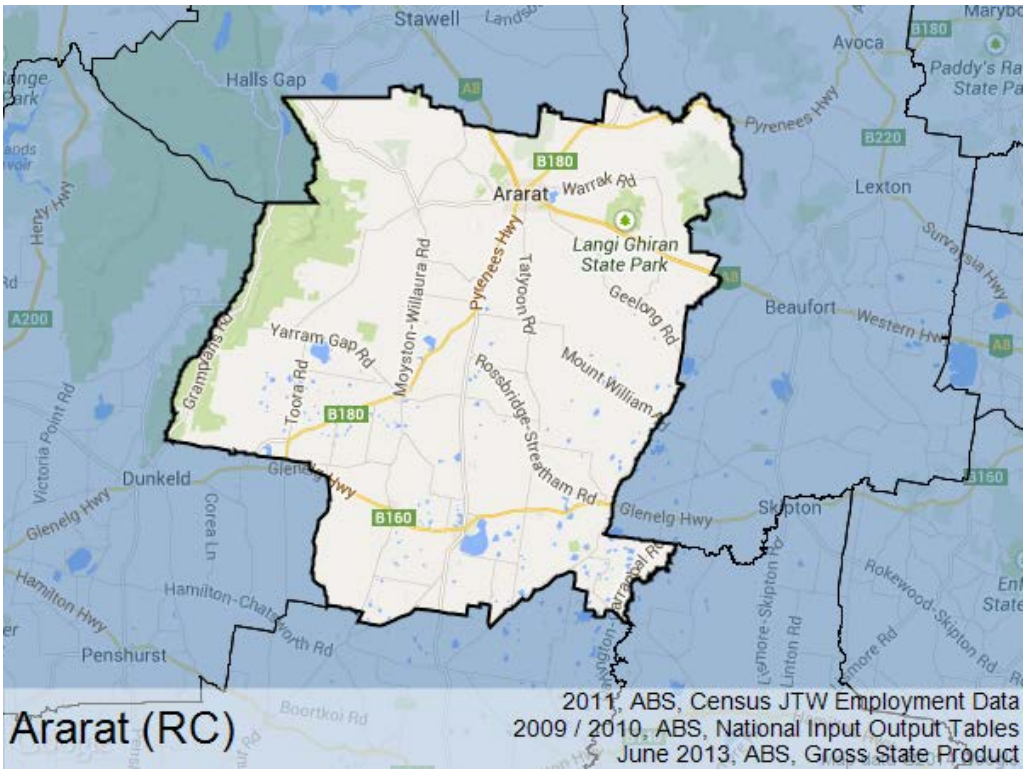
Ararat Rural City



Ararat is a major regional service centre in Victoria's mid-west. Ararat has a large retail sector that services the town and surrounding areas. Ararat is a major transport hub for both rail and road transport. Ararat is the junction for railway lines to Mildura, Adelaide, Portland, Geelong and Melbourne. The Western Highway passes through Ararat and is the major inland road link between Adelaide and Melbourne and carries around 6,000 vehicles per day of which 1500 are trucks. The Pyrenees Highway runs North South and is a major road freight link between the regional centres of Portland, Hamilton and Warrnambool and inland areas.

Ararat Rural City is comprised of a series of rural villages – including Pomonal, Armstrong, Elmhurst, Moyston, Warrack, Buangor, Maroona, Rossbridge, Willaura, Wickliffe, Lake Bolac, Westmere and Streatham. These small villages are located in the foothills and valleys around the major service centre of Ararat. Due to the topography of Ararat Rural City many of the small villages and surrounding rural areas have little or no mobile phone communication.

The Western boundary of Ararat Rural City extends into the Grampians National Park and is a popular destination for tourists. The Grampians region in 2013 received 727,000 domestic overnight visitors and 34,400 international overnight visitors. The Grampians and adjoining area is a high fire risk area that has suffered a number of catastrophic fire events over the last 10 years that have destroyed many homes and businesses. The lack of consistent mobile phone coverage has the potential to put at risk the lives of local residents and tourists during such an extreme fire event. Lack of mobile phone coverage is greatly affected by who the provider is and many visitors to the region who have good mobile coverage provided by resellers in capital cities find that they have no

coverage in regional areas.

Economic Overview Ararat RC

Area: 490,982km2

Population: 11,184 (Estimated 2014)

Gross Regional Product: $532 million

Per Capita Gross Regional Product: $47,000

Per Worker Gross Regional Product $116,890

Output

Total Output in the area is estimated at $1.79 billion.

The major contributors to output are:

Industry Sector	$M	%
Manufacturing	$360.316	30.5 %
Construction	$140.215	11.9 %
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	$132.445	11.2 %
Other	$546.548	46.3 %

Employment

Total Employment in the area is estimated at 4,556 jobs.

The major contributors to employment are:

Industry Sector	Jobs	%
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	721	15.8 %
Health Care & Social Assistance	647	14.2 %
Manufacturing	619	13.6 %
Other	2,569	56.4 %

Data sourced from:

- ABS 2011 Census JTW Employment
- ABS 2009 / 2010 National Input Output Tables
- ABS June 2013 Gross State Product

Population: 11,184 with around 8,000 living in the town of Ararat.

Gross Regional Product ($M): $532.551. Major industries include Agriculture, viticulture, meat processing,

Per Capita Gross Regional Product ($'000): $47.617

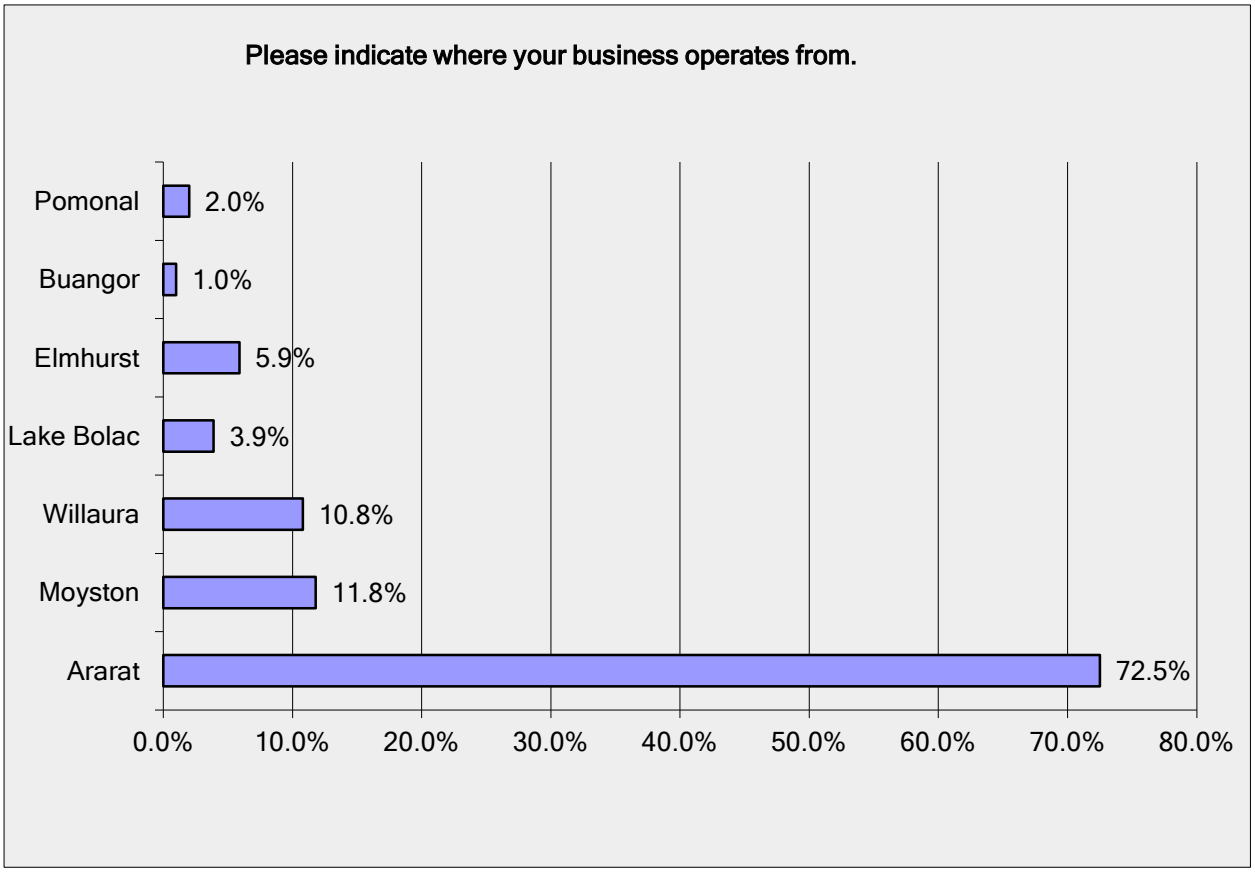
The urban and rural nature of Ararat Rural City including a large geographic area creates a need for businesses to rely on mobile communications. The increased use of information technology in the agriculture sector requires effective mobile communication in often remote areas in particular mobile phone coverage and internet access with fast download speeds.

Mobile Phone Business Survey.

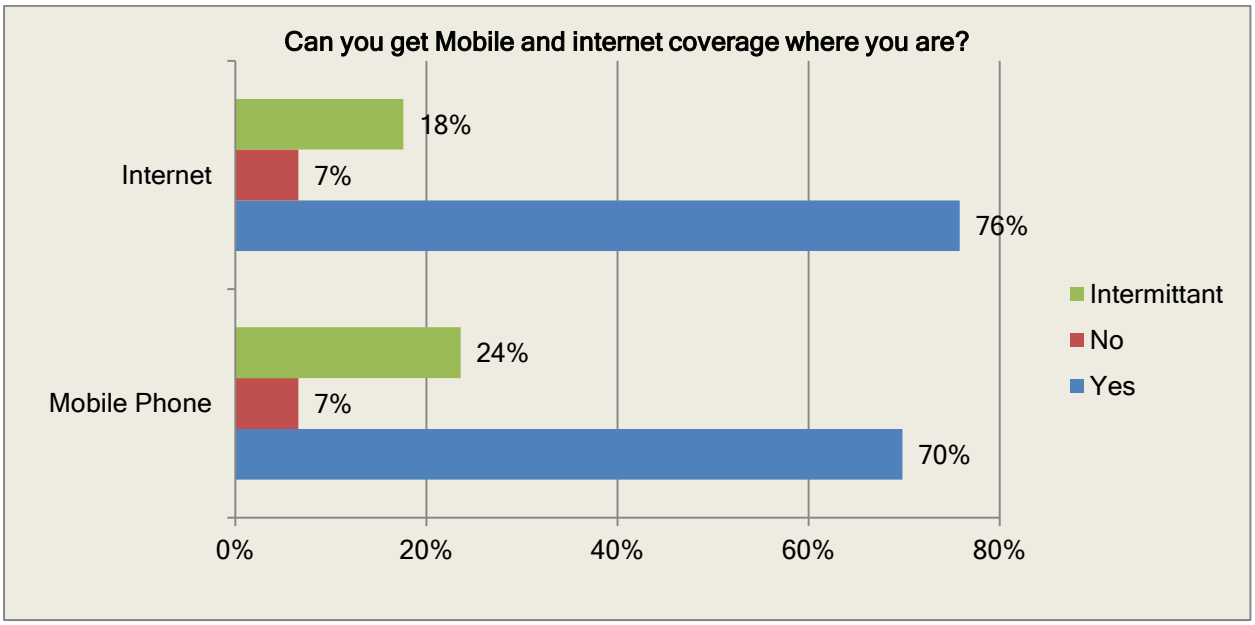
An online survey (attachment 1) was developed by the Economic Development team to gather evidence from the Ararat business community as to whether they are affected by lack of mobile coverage and if they are, to what extent.

An email (attachment 2) was sent to 291 businesses in Ararat Rural City and 107 responses were received being a response rate of 36.8%

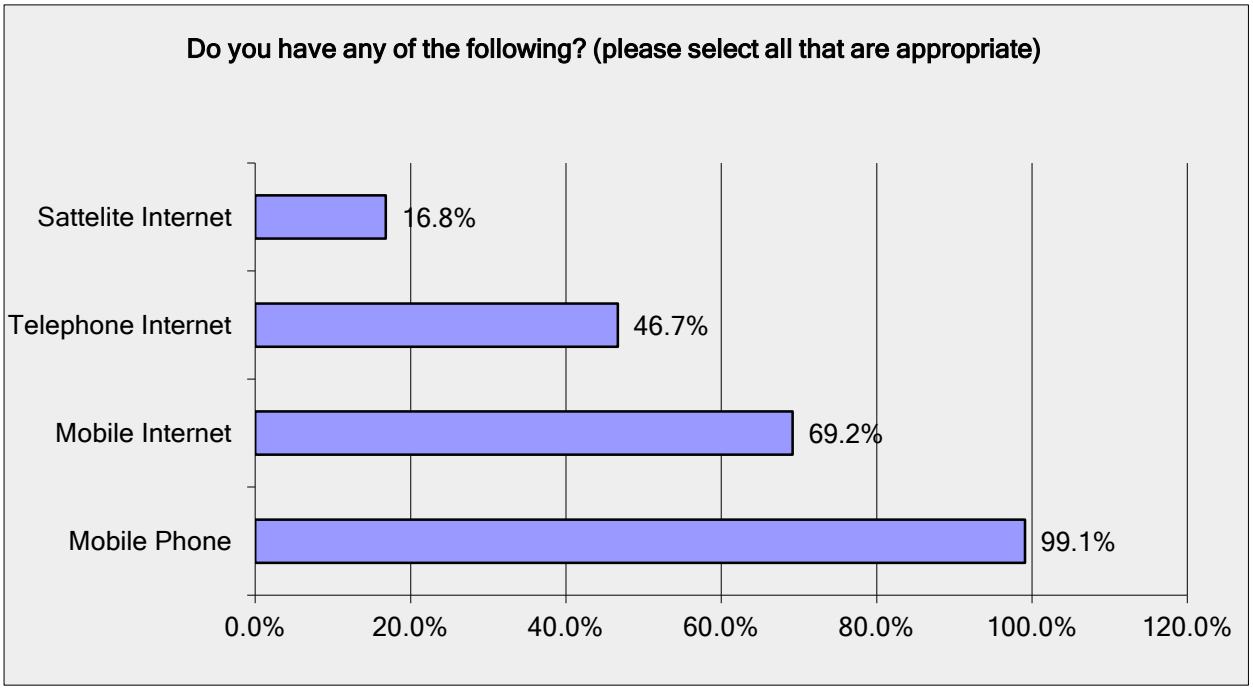
Q. 1 Location of Business



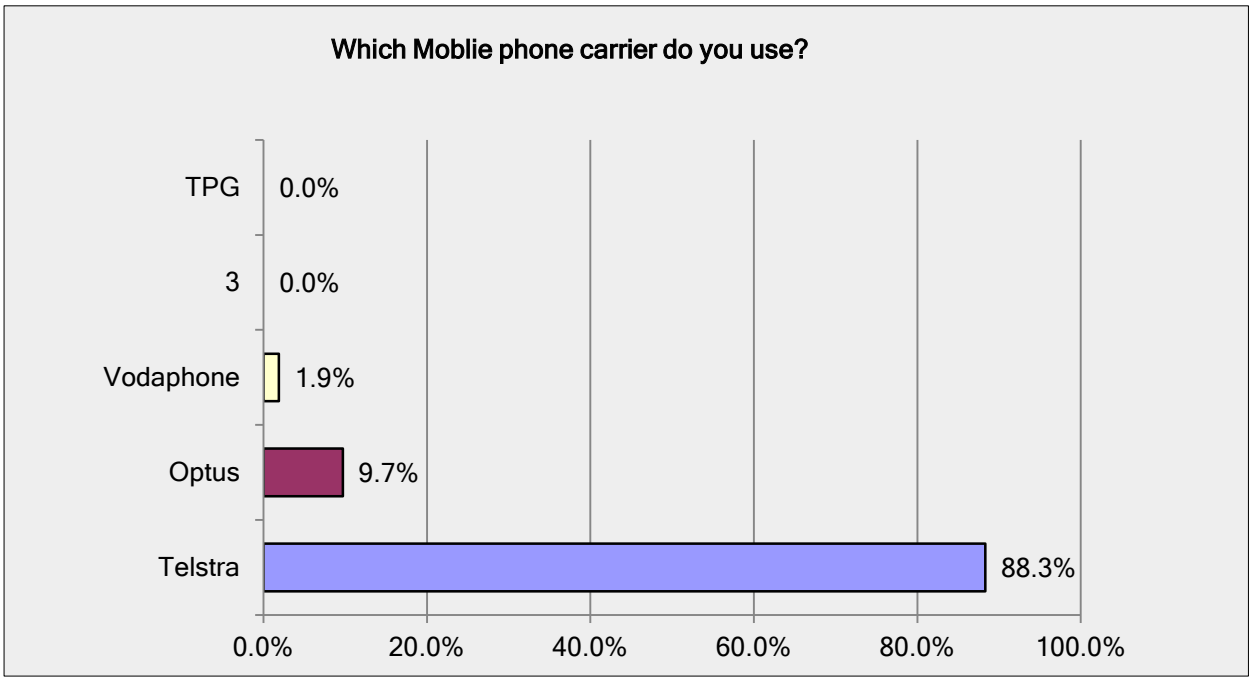
Q. 2 Coverage



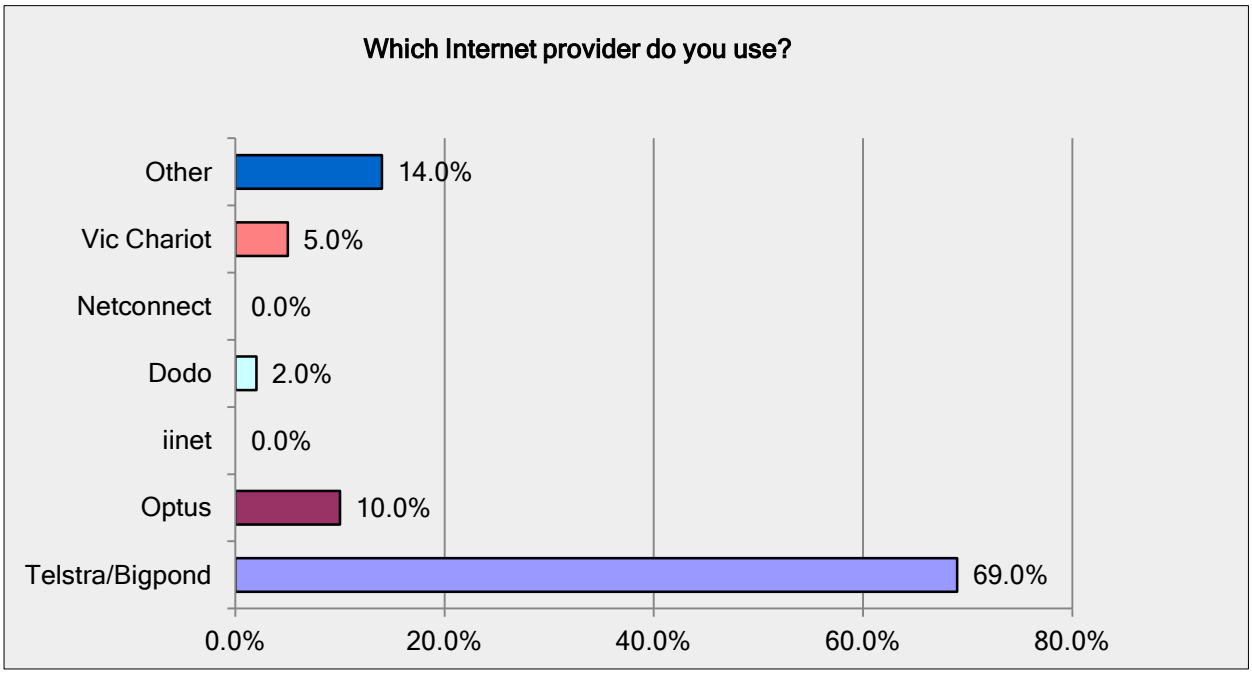
Q. 3 Types of Mobile Communications Devices



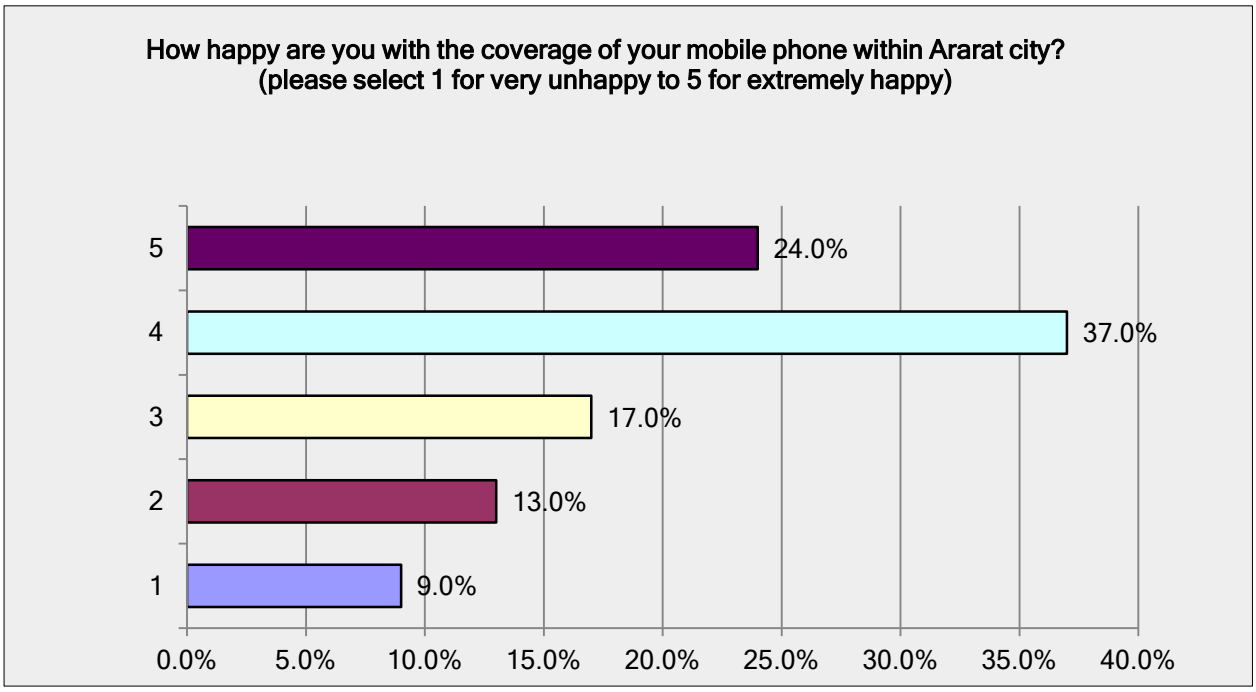
Q. 4 Mobile Carrier



Q.5 Internet Provider



Q. 6 Coverage within Ararat Township



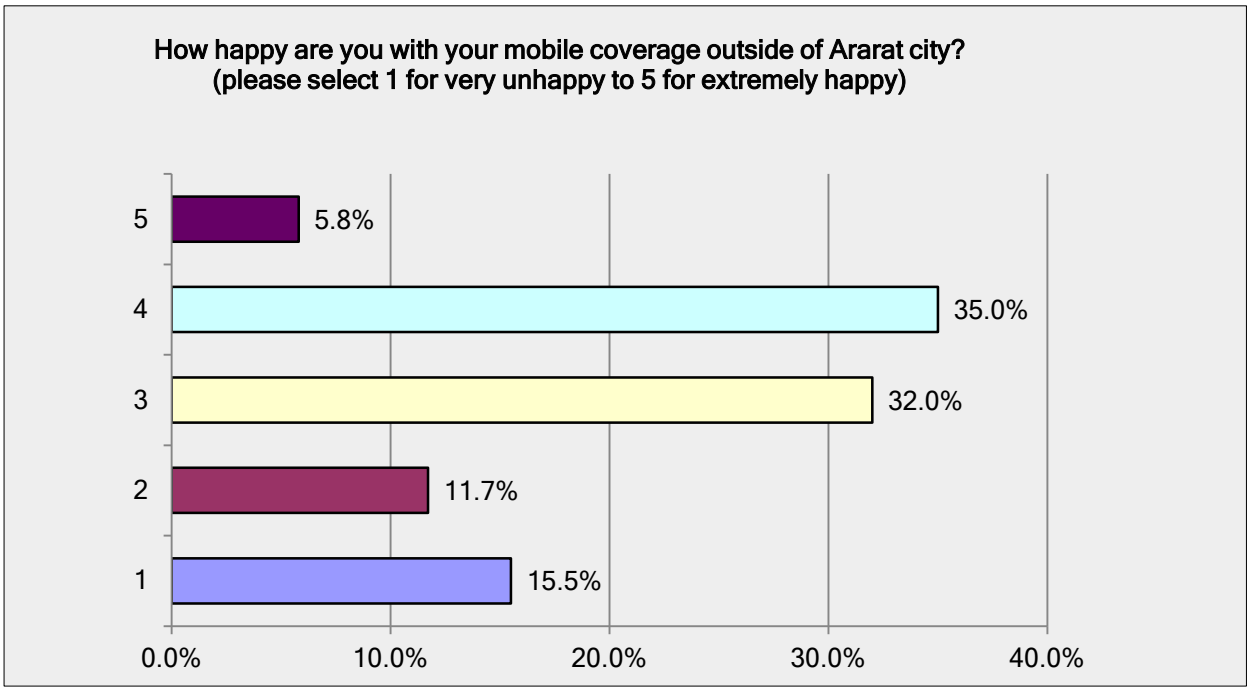
Indicative Comments:

I get voicemails when my phone did not ring. Calls drop out. It sometimes takes me 10-15 times to get a phone call to connect. I often get "call failed" alerts. Text messages also do not send. As my phone is often searching for signal - battery life is drastically reduced.

Open air, fine. Within buildings it has difficulties. This includes but is not limited to most of the supermarkets, Target, Ararat Retirement Village Hostel, Hospital, etc. Optus mobile coverage is terrible! Ever since the tower blew over about 18 months ago, lucky to get 3 out of 5 bars!

We are a Bus company that runs school buses around the Ararat shire district. We have limited phone service in these areas! Western Highway alongside Mt Langi. On the way to Elmhurst. Start of the mad mile on the Mortlake road.

Q. 8 Coverage in Rural Areas



Analysis

27% of respondents are either unhappy or very unhappy about their mobile coverage outside of the City of Ararat. As the vast majority of respondents were for the Ararat Township this figure indicates that urban dwellers are aware of the issues outside of the town and many are directly affected.

Indicative Comments:

We have extremely poor reception, very frustrating - we are at Rossbridge which works off the Willaura tower.

Can only get 1 bar where we live and it drops out often.

I travel to the Grampians and the Pyrenees regions and the coverage in and between these areas is extremely poor. Also the coverage around Great Western is extremely poor.

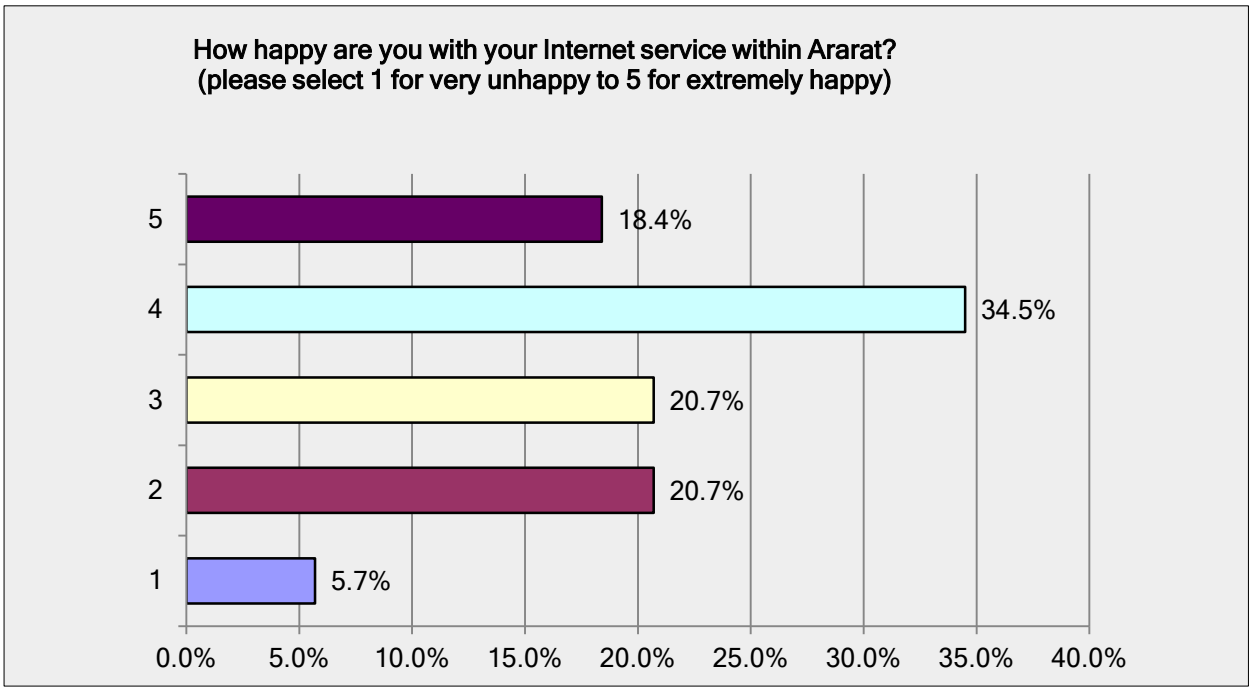
Our farm is 12km from Ararat and there is little to no coverage

Moyston part of Ararat city 15 km west struggles with appropriate coverage

Heading south towards Lake Bolac there is no coverage in the hills, about 2-3 km out of town

Have found Ararat to have the worst coverage of any place I have ever been.

Q. 9 Internet Service within Ararat Township



Analysis

26.4% of Ararat respondents rate their happiness with the internet service in Ararat as being very unhappy or unhappy.

Indicative Comments:

Optus wifi modem, signal strength is bad and drops in and out all the time

Can drop out on days of 40c [hot days]

Its slow and unpredictable

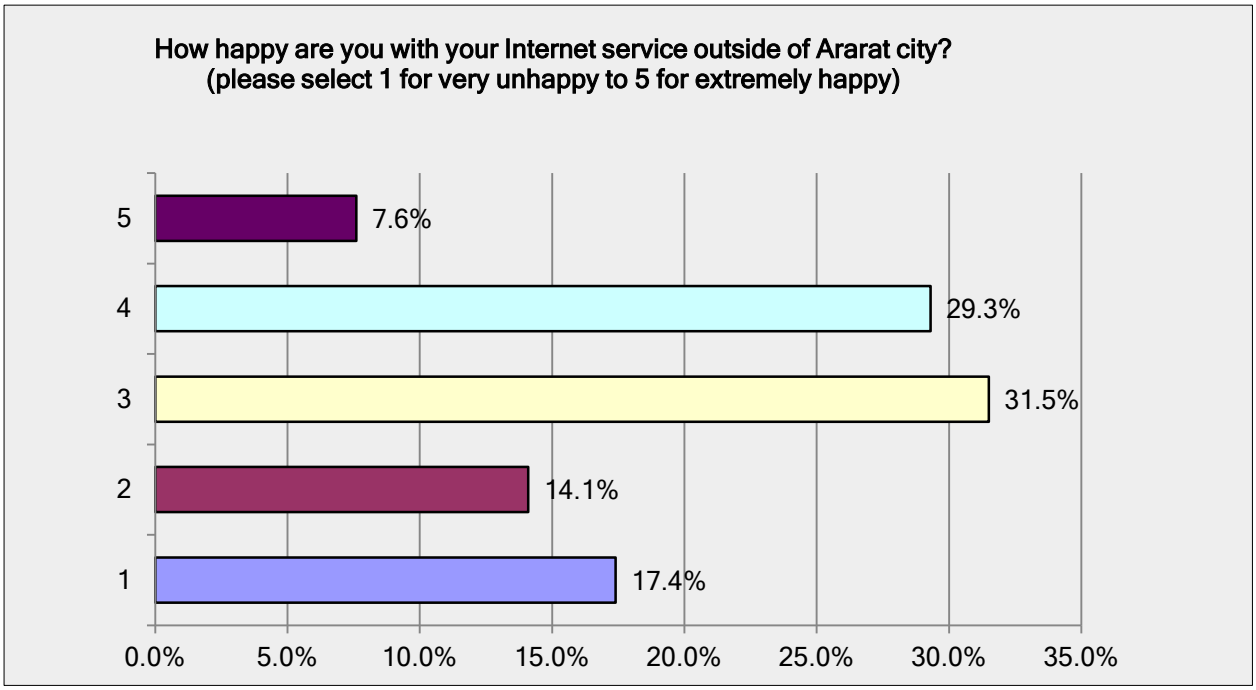
Mobile broadband has many, many black spots within town. Skype drops out. You cannot rely on it at all. We have tried to use aerials - but they do not provide a better signal.

Optus mobile internet is terrible! Ever since the tower blew over about 18 months ago, lucky to get 3 out of 5 bars! Everything is so slow to load!

Speeds are good once the connection starts transmitting data but the queue to start is at times quite delayed. For example .. this is the second time I have filled out this survey because the first attempt at uploading it timed out.

Mobile internet is patchy, very slow and drops in and out every few minutes.

Q. 10 Internet Service within Rural Areas



Indicative Comments:

I can only use Satellite and it is slow depending on the weather

If my 4g modem is in the window I get two to three bars.

Satellite only available and is very expensive compared to other adsl plans and companies available in the cities

Telstra cable hanging on our farm barb wire fence with baling twine. download speed very ordinary. For our world class 21 century farms having to do business over a 20 century connection is a national disgrace.

Could be faster

We no longer bother with Internet at the farm as it was very unreliable using Bigpond broadband (which was recommended)

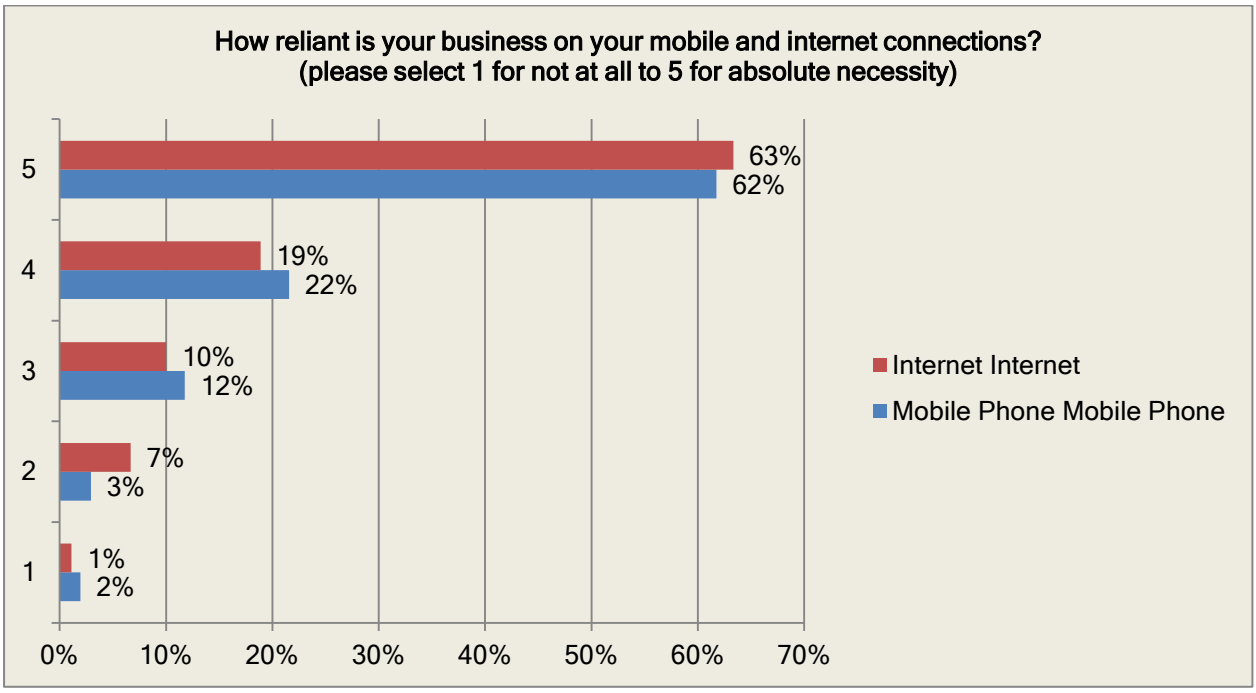
No ADSL broadband available. Mobile internet is completely unreliable. It does not work. It is impossible to work or communicate with loved ones via the internet. Options for internet providers are limited. NBN cannot help as the satellite is full. I have wasted days and days of my time trying to get a reliable internet service provider - but there is no provider than can help. It seems my only option is to set up an office in a more reliable location such as Ballarat.

No broadband, only mobile wireless and it is slow and unreliable

My satellite internet speed on the edge of Ararat is very poor.

satellite is slow and restricted

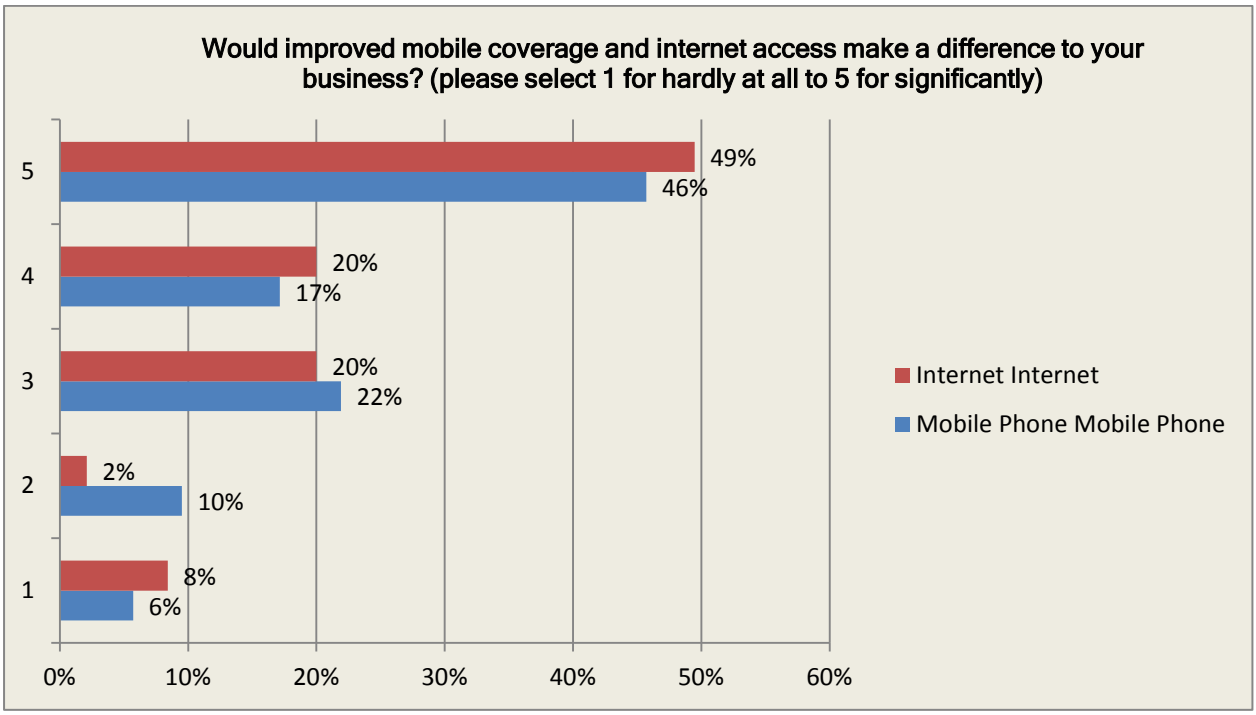
Q. 11 Business Reliance on Mobile and Internet



Analysis

These figures reflect the general move by business to e-commerce and online marketing. The agriculture and agricultural services sector are relying more heavily on mobile phone and mobile internet communications as the agriculture sector has developed a reliance on on-site data gathering and the need to access agronomic information.

Q. 12 Effect on Business on Mobile coverage



Analysis

It is hard to quantify the affect that poor mobile phone and mobile internet coverage night have on any individual business. However, the response to this question indicates that a large number of respondents feel that improved mobile and internet coverage would have wither a significant or major affect on their business,

Q. 13 Are there are other comments you would like to make?

Pathetic. Internet in Ararat is nowhere near the standard of a first world country. It is a major safety issue for rural residents that may have to deal with emergency situations like bush fires, car or farm machinery accidents or snake bites etc. Reliable and fast internet is essential for business. The lack of internet services in rural Ararat makes it hard for people to run not only local businesses, but national and international as well. If the Ararat Rural City wants to keep smart people in their municipality then they need to do everything they can to support basic services - and communications - internet and mobile phone - are essential services today.

It is important to try and get improved coverage

Only have Telstra available which is very limiting and unfair compared to city people

With the majority of administration done via the internet limited, poor or slow connection can be frustrating, expensive and puts rural business operators at a disadvantage.

It has been obvious for years that these areas have been sadly neglected by telecommunications companies.

looking forward to the new NBN tower and mobile tower at Moyston to be activated

Internet speed? Also we will only be increasing our reliance on the internet for EFTPOS and software as we now are establishing a live link to Medicare and without this we cannot function

Our farm is in a black spot and so people no longer try to get in touch with my husband if he is at the farm. This makes it extremely difficult for everyone involved.

Need real fix, not political lip service

As a new resident to Ararat I am astounded that internet access can be so behind the times. How can businesses in Ararat compete in a global economy with such poor communications services? It is not possible.

The lack of mobile and internet services is making it increasingly difficult to justify having my business ran in the Rural City of Ararat.

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

The following section relates to specific questions raised in the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper and provides answers in the context of how the issues affect Ararat Rural City. These responses are informed by the results of the Ararat Rural City Mobile Survey.

$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project

Question:

Would an appropriate minimum quality standard be that base stations must provide high-speed 4G LTE mobile broadband data communication services and also high quality 3G mobile voice and broadband data services? If this is not an appropriate minimum quality standard, what is?

Response:

It would be an appropriate minimum at this time due to a large number of mobile phones not being 4G compatible. A number of mobile users in rural areas have also retained GSM compatible phones due to perceived better coverage than 3G. Base stations would need to be built to allow retro fitting to upgrade to 4G at a later date as 4G becomes the community standard.

Question:

Does delivery option 2 for the $80 million Mobile Network Expansion component raise any additional issues that need to be considered?

Response:

Safeguards need to be in place to ensure that base stations in more remote rural locations with less volume of usage are built to the same capacity and standards as those in major regional centres to ensure that rural users are not further disadvantaged.

$20 million Mobile Black Spots Project

Question:

To what extent would the use of the NBN fixed wireless network result in improved mobile coverage outcomes in regional Australia?

Response

NBN Co. Has indicated that they intend erecting a number of towers within Ararat RC. Many of the sites are alongside or nearby existing mobile phone towers but based on the responses of residents geographic proximity to a tower does not guarantee an adequate mobile service.

Pomonal, a township and rural area of Ararat Rural City is one of the possible sites for a NBN Tower. Pomonal is adjacent to the Grampians National Park and contains a large number of tourism accommodation businesses. Pomonal along with other rural areas in Ararat Rural City has a number of black spot areas for mobile communications and would benefit greatly in economic and social terms as well as increasing community safety if the NBN Tower could serve a dual purpose and support Mobile Internet and Mobile Phone coverage.

The erection of five NBN towers in Ararat Rural City provides an opportunity to utilise the infrastructure to improve mobile coverage to all areas within Ararat Rural City. This should be seen as an enhancement to the existing underperforming infrastructure rather than a duplication of

existing infrastructure. Enhance capacity and capability provides an opportunity for residents to access different carriers and should increase competition leading to cost savings for businesses.