

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:	Blackall-Tambo Regional Council
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Date:	26.02.2014

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

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.



Blackall-Tambo
Regional Council

Exploring the past. Innovating the future.

Mobile Phone Programme Discussion Paper

Submission

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Chief Executive Officer
Ken Timms



Blackall-Tambo
Regional Council

28/02/2014

Demographics and Location

Blackall is situated on the Lansborough Highway, (Matilda Highway) approximately 1000kms northwest of Brisbane, in the Blackall-Tambo local government area. The region comprises of two towns; Blackall being the larger with a population of 1200 in the township and Tambo the smaller with a population of 360. There are 2086 residents in the region, (OESR census 2011 data)

The region covers an area of 30,502 sq kms, and is some of the richest pastoral lands in the State of Queensland. Primary production and its associated industries of transport, rural contracting, and macropod harvesting are major employers, as are local government, tourism, health, education and retail industries. Resource exploration, civil works and the Mining industry are fast becoming significant employers in the region.

The Blackall-Tambo Region is one of seven member Local Governments of Western Queensland of the Remote Area Planning and Development Board.



The Blackall-Tambo Regional area is classified as regional and remote and has limited access to high quality telecommunication services and facilities, being restricted to one service provider, vast areas of no or extremely poor mobile network coverage and slow and limited capacity internet, all of which impede business productivity and efficiency.

Distance is already an impediment the impact of which could be minimized through the provision of high quality telecommunications including improved speed, coverage, affordability and accessibility.

Coverage: Identified Mobile Black Spots

The major arterial roads within the region are prone to large expanses of extremely limited to no mobile phone coverage.

Mobile Black Spot locations within the Blackall-Tambo Region in Central Western Queensland include:

Town Connection	Road	Distance of Road	Blackspot issue
Blackall- Barcaldine	Landsborough Highway	105km	70km of no or very limited coverage
Blackall-Tambo	Landsborough Highway	100km	20km of no coverage
Tambo- Augathella	Landsborough Highway	120km	65 km of no or very limited coverage
Tambo-Alpha	Alpha-Tambo Rd -Road of Local Significance	160km	105kms of no coverage

Landsborough Highway

The Blackall-Tambo Region is transected by the Landsborough Highway which is which is the major transportation route between Darwin, Brisbane and southern states for both livestock and general freight.

The highway experiences large numbers of Heavy Vehicle and general motor traffic usage; averaging just under 500 vehicles per day and up to 740 during the 'tourist season'. Telecommunications negatively impact on all these travelers who pass through the area for both business and pleasure by imposing inefficiencies on business communications and posing risks to general community safety with vast distances having little to no communications access.

Within our regional area this route has extensive areas of extremely limited to no coverage and has been closed due to significant natural disasters and flood events five times since 2009. During natural disaster events telecommunications are of primary importance and the current situation with significant communication Black Spots has placed the safety of the community and general public at risk.

The Landsborough Highway is the gateway to Western Queensland which experiences high seasonal visitation during the winter months with over 453,000 visitors to the Outback annually. There has been a 3% increase in visitation in three years to June 2013. The majority of visitors accessing this region are long haul self-drive tourists and the most common and frequented route is the Landsborough Highway.

Limited mobile service accessibility and service provision negatively impacts on these visitors in a number of ways. Lack of choice of mobile network provider in these regions poses a financial impost as it necessitates visitors to purchase a new mobile device, there is a negative perception of the telecommunications provider in this regional area due to the restricted service on the road network due to coverage black spots, which leads to negative perceptions of the Outback as a destination. Safety of travelers to the region is similarly compromised by mobile network black spots, large distances and low population density.

Alpha-Tambo Road:

The Alpha-Tambo Road is a Local Road of Regional Significance (LRRS) providing links to southern corridors to Brisbane and interstate from the areas of major mining and agricultural activity, and a significant access and supply route between the western corridor and eastern seaboard for agriculture and increasingly for mining, general freight & tourism. Agricultural business efficiencies have been increased by utilizing this route to access markets and processing plants at Biloela, Mackay and Rockhampton which are closer via the Alpha-Tambo route than traditional southern markets.

This vital transport link is experiencing significant increase in usage; from 2010 to 2013 the AADT (annual average daily traffic) has increased by 55%. Regional activity indicates that traffic usage of this roadway will continue to increase significantly in the next three to five years.

Tourism in Central and Western Queensland has been increasing at a faster rate than coastal areas; The Alpha-Tambo Road is a scenic tourist route; travelers are increasingly accessing the Blackall-Tambo Region via this route. There are currently negotiations occurring regarding the development of a major indigenous tourism attraction, 'The Palace' accessed via the Alpha-Tambo Road.

There are four coal mine projects currently currently in planning and early construction phases near Alpha (additional State and Federal approvals were obtained in Oct 2013); of the projected 4500 personnel workforce it is expected a high proportion will travel to and from the area. Proponents will be encouraged to recruit locally for workers and contractors as far as practicable.

Population projections for Alpha are 500-2000 persons, it logically follows that the town of Tambo will similarly experience a population increase as accommodation and services are affordable and proximal. It is anticipated that a significant workforce for the Alpha mines will be drawn from the Blackall-Tambo region resulting in a significant increase of traffic on the Alpha-Tambo Road.

This roadway is only partly sealed, being approximately half pavement surface and half gravelled surface. Consequently this road connection has been closed due to wet weather and flood events thirteen times since 2009, on numerous occasions the road is only accessible for four-wheel drive vehicles.

The current situation with 105km of no mobile coverage needs addressing; lack of communications presents a high risk to community safety that will only increase as the traffic volumes on this road increase.

Potential Brownfield Sites:

Within the Blackall-Tambo Region there currently exists infrastructure that has the potential to be utilised as 'brownfield' sites that could increase the feasibility of installation of equipment to address the identified mobile coverage black spots.

Access to sites and infrastructure that are controlled by Council would be provided as in-kind support for investment in telecommunications network infrastructure aimed at improving the coverage and quality of services in this regional area. Similarly Council would provide access to Council owned and or controlled land for construction of new 'greenfield' sites if required.

Community Impacts:

Mobile Phone networks are currently only provided and serviced by a single operator in this region; this results in a complete lack of competition which makes consumers price takers not makers. This is a further inequity facing residents living in remote and regional areas which increases the cost of living for communities that are already economically challenged. According to the Social Economic Index of Disadvantage 74.7 per cent of the population of Blackall Tambo Regional Local Government Area (LGA) are in the most disadvantaged quintile. Compared with the 20 per cent average across Queensland, only 15.8 per cent of the population of Blackall-Tambo are in the least disadvantaged quintile.

Residents in regional and remote areas should have access to a choice of provider which would enable competition and consequently result in better service, lower prices which would represent savings to the end consumer. The current discussion paper makes no reference to service pricing; this is a concern for remote and regional areas which needs to be addressed to protect residents in these areas.

The framework for tender by MNOs needs to include guarantees of service improvement, improvement in communication quality standards and cost containment with regards to remote and regional areas where there exists little likelihood of competition.

Within the Blackall-Tambo Region the smaller community of Tambo will not gain access or be serviced by the NBN as the population of this township is only 360 and 450 in the district area. With no access to the NBN, residents are more reliant on the mobile networks for access to data for business services, during natural disasters, weather events and to access government services such as health. A shift in emphasis within the programme to consider the end consumer is warranted for a \$100 million commitment of public funds.

A further concern is the lack of detail surrounding the on-going long term maintenance of the infrastructure, there is no incentive outlined within the discussion paper for the MNOs to indicate how the equipment will be kept up to date and operational.

For the communities of the Blackall-Tambo Region access to quality mobile network services is vital, this region is isolated geographically, economically disadvantaged and has a declining population. For this regional area to strengthen, population to increase, business and industry to develop; reliable, fast quality modern communications services are essential. Western Queensland has resources and agricultural industries that make a significant contribution to the national economy; to ensure regional productivity and efficiency in the market access to the digital economy of comparative standard to urban regions is essential.