

# The Council of The Shire of Bourke

29 Mitchell St, Bourke, N.S.W 2840  
P.O. Box 21, Bourke, N.S.W 2840  
Telephone (02) 6830 8000 Fax (02) 6872 3030  
Email: [bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bourkeshire@bourke.nsw.gov.au)  
Web: <http://www.bourke.nsw.gov.au>



Please address all  
communications to  
the General Manager

Our Ref: RE-KSH

26th February 2014

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

[mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au](mailto:mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au)

Dear Sir,

**Re: Submission in Response to Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper**

Attached hereto is a brief submission in response to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper which was published on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

Council would appreciate being kept informed on all developments in relation to the proposed expansion of the mobile service network as the absence of mobile phone coverage impacts on a large number of the residents of our shire area.

In an environment of rapid change, in all areas of technology many of these changes which are dependent on or linked to mobile phones services and those persons without access to mobile service are severely disadvantaged.

Yours Faithfully,

  
Ross Earl  
General Manager

# 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: Bourke Shire Council

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Website (if applicable): [www.bourke.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bourke.nsw.gov.au)

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> 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 ☐

*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](mailto: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.

# **SUBMISSION BY BOURKE SHIRE COUNCIL IN RESPONSE TO THE MOBILE COVERAGE PROGRAMME DISCUSSION PAPER ISSUED DECEMBER 2013**

## **Introduction**

The background to the discussion paper states as follows,

*"Inadequate mobile phone coverage remains a significant issue for Australians living, working and travelling in regional areas of the country. The 2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review identified a lack of adequate mobile voice and broadband coverage as the issue of greatest concern to regional communities.*

*Australia's three national mobile network operators (MNOs) - Optus, Telstra and Vodafone Hutchison Australia - collectively claim to provide mobile coverage to 99 per cent of the population (i.e. premises). However, reflecting our country's highly urbanised population, this level of coverage equates to only around 25 per cent of the landmass. In addition:*

- in some locations within the mobile coverage footprint, reception is only possible using additional equipment such as a car kit or external antenna – handheld reception is not available; and*
- for significant portions of regional Australia where coverage is available, it is provided by only a single MNO.*

*The objective of the Mobile Coverage Programme is to invest in telecommunications network infrastructure to improve both coverage of high quality terrestrial mobile voice and wireless broadband services in regional Australia, and competition in the provision of such services".*

Council would concur that the inadequacy of mobile phone coverage in rural Australia places the residents of those areas at a significant disadvantage and does not allow them access to a number of the technological opportunities that mobile services provide.

Council would whole heartedly support any initiative to improve mobile coverage within our Shire area.

## **Bourke Shire Situation**

Bourke Shire Council covers over an area of 41652 square kilometres with a road network of some 2809 kilometres including 356 kilometres of state highways.

Large sections of the Shire are without any coverage and in a number of other areas the coverage is marginal at best and with a road network as large as detailed, this absence of mobile service does not provide the travelling public the same degree of security enjoyed by those who have access to that service.

The town of Bourke itself has adequate coverage but both the villages of Louth and Enngonia have very poor coverage and would benefit if a repeater could be installed. It is understood that the installation of repeaters is not a hugely expensive task and whilst not providing an increased area of coverage would dramatically improve the quality of service

The town of Wanaaring some two hundred kilometres west of Bourke has no coverage at all.

This is the situation in relation to much of the rural area of the shire, although reception is in some cases available, the service is somewhat spasmodic.

Whilst understanding the cost of the erection of towers and base stations ect is expensive there has to be a "community service obligation " on behalf of the MNOs and the Federal Government to dramatically reduce this unacceptable void in mobile service coverage.

The ability of some areas to generate the call volume to ensure the income generated results in cost recovery of the outlay is questionable at best but the economics of the proposals has to in many cases considered in light of the considerable social benefit to residents and the travelling public.

### **Technology**

With mobile phones providing GPS, Weather updates, Banking Facilities ect they have become much more than a means of simply voice communication they have become an important "life tool" to many people who rely on the availability of service in the undertaking of everyday tasks, including payment of accounts and access to emails ect

### **Emergency Services**

The emergency service providers have become increasing reliant on the mobile service both as a means of internal contact and also the issue of such things as flood warnings and evacuation orders.

During recent bushfire emergencies within the shire a number of visiting personnel took some time to adjust to the absence of this means of communication and information source.

They would normally have been heavily reliant on mobile phone service and to a large degree a mobile phone service formed part of their accepted fire fighting strategy.

### **Tourism**

Bourke is known as "the Gateway to the Far West" and has a growing tourism industry and with its iconic status in Australian folklore, attracts a number of tourists who travel via Bourke to Wanaaring then on to Tibooburra and there is often a sense of disbelief when they are unable to utilise their mobile phones.

The "apps" on mobile phones include tourist information and also maps ect on which many people had become somewhat reliant and the absence of the availability of these accepted services tends to cause a degree of distress.

### **Business Applications**

Critical to all business success is the ability to access and utilise modern technology, and this no less import to the residents and business people who operate within this part of the state.

## **\$80 Million Mobile Network Expansion**

Council notes the criteria in relation under Delivery Option *that the bidder should have regard for the list of locations established by the Commonwealth of areas that are reported to have poor, or no, mobile coverage.*

*The Commonwealth will prepare this list based on*

- *Representations made by citizens, organisations and elected representatives about locations which have poor, or no, mobile coverage*
- *Advice by State and territory governments and*
- *Mapping, test drive and other relevant data*

**Bourke Shire Council would like the whole of area covered by Bourke Shire Council included on that list as the bulk of the Shire meets those criteria.**

## **Numbers of Providers**

Given the relative small volume of calls it would appear that it is probably very unlikely that we will have multiple MNO's operate within the region. Currently there is only the one MNO within the region; however, this should not adversely impact on our communities

## **\$20 Million Mobile Black Spots Project**

Following the allocation of the \$80 million dollars mentioned above there will be also funding provided to under a stage two (2) in an amount of 20 million dollars under a Black Spots Project.

Eligibility will be subject to an EOI process.

It is anticipated EOIs will be received from Local Governments, however, other entities such as local businesses may also submit an EOI. It states that all EOIs should include a commitment to provide a co-contribution towards the proposed base station. The co-contributions could be in the form of cash, or in kind contributions such as site access or road or power installation.

Local Government does not have the financial capacity in most instances to make any substantial co-contribution with its resources currently being stretched to the limit in providing both the basic services required by their communities and picking up the shortfall where the other tiers of government have failed to provide a range of services including medical facilities.

Australia is a large country and the population is heavily concentrated along the eastern sea board but this does not mean that the Federal Government should abrogate its responsibility to the persons living in other parts of the country who have an expectation

and indeed a right, to the same level of essential services. Mobile Phone coverage has become one of these essential services.

### **The Assessment Criteria**

It would appear that the assessment criteria places an emphasis on "the number of premises" served and this would seem to favour of the more heavily populated areas and this would apply also to "level of co-contribution" able to be provided which obviously means to areas with higher concentrations of population would be able to provide a higher co- contribution.

The fact that the size of the area covered is included is somewhat reassuring but this would appear to be secondary to the number of premises.

### **Other Options**

The paper refers to in a number of areas with "external antenna" coverage and perhaps in the short term an increased education on the technology available to boost reception may prove beneficial.

This option would be relevant to both the travelling public and those centres of population within Australia currently without adequate mobile reception, with any improvement no doubt welcome.

A subsidy scheme would encourage the adoption of new technology and would be a low cost way of improving coverage once an information /education program was instituted to increase the knowledge of the technology that was available to improve coverage, such as external aerials.

### **Audit of Existing Towers**

In some areas there are existing towers which may be able to be utilised to readily expand the mobile network.

Given the cost of tower erection will heavily impact on the funds required to expand the network, the opportunity should be undertaken to review the availability of existing facilities, which are currently redundant or under utilised.

### **Summary**

Council welcomes the availability of the additional funding but also recognizes the absence of mobile service coverage across Australia will not be solved or being closed to being solved, with the current level of funding, however, it is a start.

There needs to be recognition that mobile phone services have become an essential "life tool" and with the number of applications now available with mobile phones and similar

devices and those persons without access to mobile service are at a distinct disadvantage both commercially and socially.

Council would encourage you to review the existence of currently under utilised towers for their suitability for use to expand the networks and also consider the installation of "repeater or booster" technology where appropriate as a means of improving service to those areas where existing reception is marginal.

Council would like to reaffirm its stance that it would like the whole of Bourke Shire to be considered under the program for the improvement of mobile phone service which as detailed earlier, is very poor in a large section of the shire and non-existent in others.