

# 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

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**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

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

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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.

## **Mobile Coverage Programme**

### **MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE IN DUNGOG SHIRE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the best way to deliver the Government's funding commitment towards a program to improve mobile coverage and competition in regional Australia.

This program review, and mobile coverage in Dungog Shire more generally, was included on the agenda of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of the Shire of Dungog held on Tuesday, 18 February 2014. The outcomes of that meeting, along with comments made at Dungog Council's Tourism Advisory Committee and the Dungog District Chamber of Commerce.

#### **ISSUE**

As mentioned in the Discussion Paper, Inadequate mobile phone coverage remains a significant issue for Australians living, working and travelling in regional areas of the country and this is certainly the case in various areas of Dungog Shire for local residents and businesses, and also for visitors to the area.

#### **THE CURRENT SITUATION**

Dungog Shire is in the Hunter Region of NSW and is renowned for its forests, mountains and picturesque river villages. The Local Government Area covers an area of 2248 square kilometres and is bordered in the north by the Barrington Tops plateau, which is part of the Great Dividing Range. The Shire consists predominantly of very rugged to hilly country which becomes less rugged from north to south.

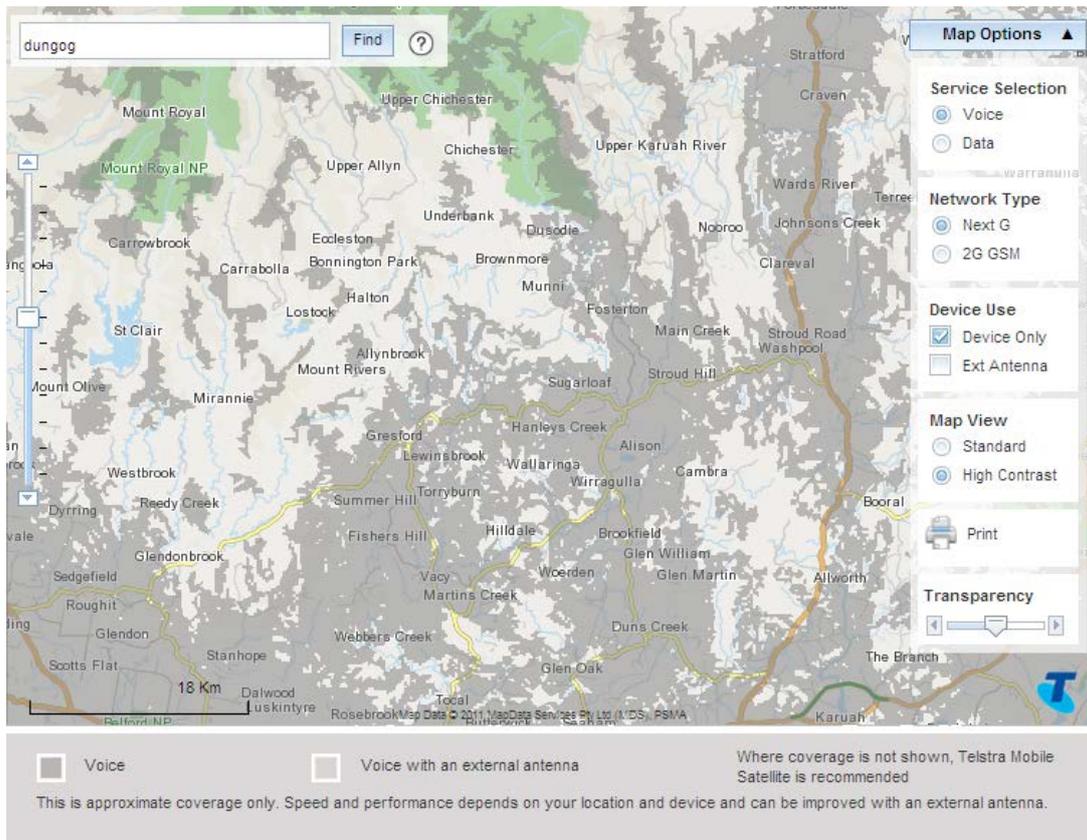
The Shire has two principal rivers, the Williams in the east and the Paterson (and its major tributary the Allyn) in the west.

The most notable area in the Shire where there is limited or no mobile coverage using a hand held mobile phone is the town of Paterson and surrounds. Coverage is also patchy in the Allyn Valley north of East Gresford, in the Paterson Valley north of Gresford and in the Williams Valley north of Dungog.

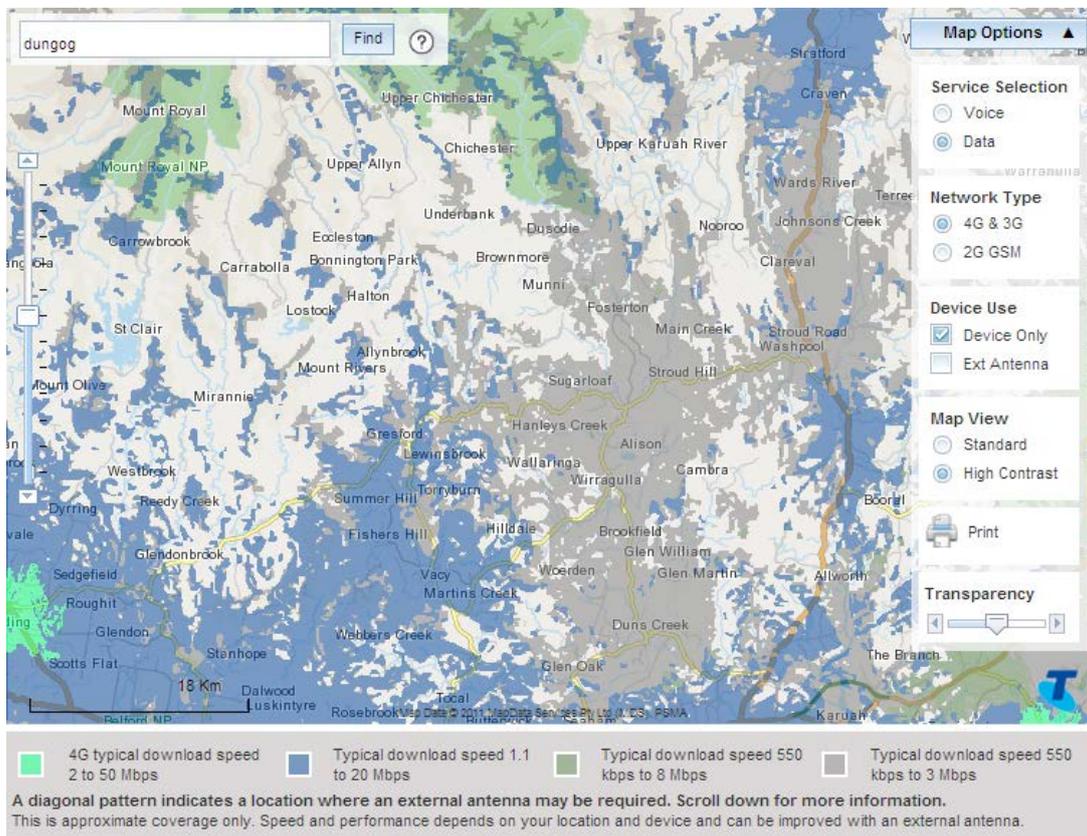
Residents particularly in the areas of Paterson, Vacy and Gresford have complained of poor mobile service for a number of years and people travelling from Maitland to Gresford find that their mobile service frequently cuts out at Tocal and does not really come on again until well north of Paterson.

Telstra mobile phone coverage is available from the website at [www.telstra.com.au/mobile-phones/coverage-networks/our-coverage](http://www.telstra.com.au/mobile-phones/coverage-networks/our-coverage) and is shown in the figures on the following page.

**Figure 1: Telstra mobile phone coverage in Dungog Shire – voice, Next G, device only**



**Figure 2: Telstra mobile phone coverage in Dungog Shire – data, 4G & 3G, device only**



## **OUR CASE FOR IMPROVED MOBILE COVERAGE IN DUNGOG SHIRE**

### **Our general response to the Department's invitation to make submissions**

There are a number of compelling reasons for appropriate/better mobile coverage in Dungog Shire, which include the nature of the local economy, the visitor economy and personal and community safety:

#### **Local Economy**

The Shire's economy has traditionally been based on agriculture and timber, with the alluvial river flats suitable for intensive agricultural production. The balance of the rural land has been traditionally used for grazing. Some of the considerations for improved mobile coverage include:

- The Paterson and Clarence Town district are the fastest growing areas in the Shire, being the closest to the major centres of Maitland, Raymond Terrace and Newcastle. The residents of these areas expect to have access to modern technologies equivalent to their friends and relatives living in more densely populated urban areas.
- The Maitland/Tocal/Paterson/Gresford Road is busy and is getting busier with a 17% increase in traffic between 2011 and 2013. It is a significant transport route with 3,653 vehicles per day in December 2013
- There are many people in the region who rely on mobile coverage for home and farm businesses and associated services such as farm contractors, livestock carriers, veterinary surgeons etc
- Adequate mobile service and other basic technologies should be available to those who wish to relocate to the Dungog Shire for lifestyle or business.
- Inadequate telecommunications infrastructure, including mobile telephone services, has seen a loss of businesses in Paterson. This includes the move of PowerServe, one of Australia's leading electrical power systems and cabling infrastructure providers, from Paterson to Thornton (northwest of Newcastle).

#### **Visitor Economy**

Tourism is also a focus of Dungog Shire's economy with the National Parks, State Forests, and the historic and scenic character of the area providing the major focus for attracting visitors. Visitation to the BTNP is estimated by the Department of Environment & Climate Change (National Parks) to be in the order of 700,000 to 1,000,000 people per annum, with visitation concentrated in the northern and central areas of the Park. The Department of Primary Industries (Forests) estimates that the Chichester Forest area in Dungog Shire attracts around 250,000 to 300,000 visitors per annum, including more than 100,000+ campers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 5: Recreation And Tourism Potentials Report by (Jenny Rand & Associates) prepared as part of the comprehensive Dungog Local Government Area Situation Analysis, February 2010 and available for download at [www.dungog.nsw.gov.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=494712:dungog-local-government-area-situation-a&catid=1484&Itemid=2671](http://www.dungog.nsw.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=494712:dungog-local-government-area-situation-a&catid=1484&Itemid=2671)

Some of the considerations for improved mobile coverage include:

- In October 2012 Dungog Showground was the venue for a Mumford and Sons Gentlemen of the Road music concert. Approximately 13,500 people attended this event and the mobile network was unable to cope with the increased demand on services, even with the provision of an additional mobile tower.
- Tocal College, Tocal Field Days, Tocal Homestead attracts at least 40,000 visitors per year along with the on-going activities that occur at Tocal throughout the year
- The Paterson Valley is an attractive place for tourists and those who want to travel in the countryside but still be close to the coast and other amenities. It is the southern gateway to the Barrington Tops. Most of the tourism operators in the Paterson and Allyn valleys are members of an association named Allyn Paterson Valley Tourism (APVT) and their website is at <http://www.apvt.com.au/>
- Anti-social behavior in the Chichester State Forest in the Upper Allyn area during peak periods (Christmas and New Year Period, Easter, and the Labour Day weekend in October. The Police and local residents have expressed concern about the risks associated with large numbers of campers in this area due to the lack of mobile coverage, vandalism of the one public telephone and distance from the Central Hunter Local Area Command police stations.

### **Personal and community safety**

Dungog Shire residents are concerned about the risks of not having adequate mobile services, especially in times of emergency or natural disaster. Although Radio Dungog ("Dungog Shire's Own" community radio station, frequency 107.9) is broadcasting from the town of Dungog and their mission is ultimately to provide Shire-wide information in times of natural disasters and other emergencies, they currently only have a limited coverage around the town.

Some of the considerations for improved mobile coverage include:

- People living in the village of Paterson are totally denied any access to mobile phone coverage at present. This puts families at risk.
- Farming families living in many areas of the Shire, but particularly in the northern areas, are at risk when working on their properties without basic risk management devices.
- De-population of permanent residents or people using rural areas as weekend retreats, especially in the northern areas of the Shire, means that locals and visitors travelling our roads are at risk if there is a road accident or other incident due to poor mobile coverage.
- The region is prone to extensive flooding, often quite localised. Streams can rise rapidly, and a number of local rural roads have either fords, low level crossings or low bridges. These floods leave people isolated and often in need of technology support. The region is also susceptible to bush fires, exacerbating risks if families don't have basic phone services

Over the past few years there have been a number of declared natural disasters in Dungog Shire as shown in the table below.

<b>When</b>	<b>Type of event</b>	<b>Area affected</b>
June 2007	Major flood event	All of Dungog Shire
February 2009	Major flood event	All of Dungog Shire
February 2013	Major flood event	All of Dungog Shire
November 2013	Major flood event	Southern area of Dungog Shire

Also, over the past few years the Dungog Rural Fire Service reports a number of incidents where Group Officers or Brigades have had to drive to the nearest elevated area to obtain mobile service (personal communication, February 2014). Sometimes this can be several kilometres and affects the effective management of the situation. Clarence Town Rural Fire Service has reported that they experience trouble at the head of Woerdens Road and around the Glen Oak area.

<b>When</b>	<b>Type of event</b>	<b>Locality</b>
October 2012	Fire call	Skimmings Gap Road, Main Creek
		Cambra (east of Dungog)
		Wangat Trig Road, Bandon Grove
		Monkerai
October 2013	Fire call	Dog Trap Creek, Gresford
	Smoke sighting	Cabbage Creek, Main Creek
	Fire call	Carrabolla
January 2014	Motor vehicle accident	Salisbury
		Skimmings Gap Road, Main Creek
		Quart Pot Creek

**Response to Q17.**

**Is there a more effective means of assessing seasonal demand than proposed in criterion 3(c)?**

The discussion paper indicates that \$20 million will be provided under the mobile blackspots project to address unique mobile coverage problems, such as areas with high demand for services during seasonal holiday periods.

The discussion paper indicates that each proposed base station (or group of base stations) will be assessed according to the extent of coverage benefit and one measure suggested is the number of sites/rooms/cabins offered by accommodation providers (for example, motels or caravan parks) within the new 'handheld' and 'external antenna' footprints.

We suggest that a better measure of increased demand on mobile services might be a comparison between the average annual number of visitors (e.g expressed as average weekly or monthly numbers) and the average number of visitors in peak times. This would take into account day trippers, as well as people staying in paid accommodation and people staying with friends and relatives (see Destination NSW Growing the Visitor Economy at [http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/79734/LGSA-Conference-presentation-March-2012.pdf](http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/79734/LGSA-Conference-presentation-March-2012.pdf))

Importantly, peak times could be during public holiday long weekends, school holidays, winter or summer or transition seasons, as well and periods associated with major events. As mentioned earlier in this submission, major events in Dungog Shire such as the annual Small Farms Field Days at Tocal (near Paterson) and the Mumford and Sons Gentlemen of the Road concert in October 2012 put increased pressure on the mobile service.

Attachment 1 on the following pages indicates the number of events in Dungog Shire that are impacted by poor mobile coverage in the local area. Several of the events are located in Paterson township and others are located in the more remote parts of the Shire, especially north of Dungog and East Gresford.

## Attachment 1: Dungog Shire Events – 2014

When	Event name	Description	Location
<b>Monthly</b>			
<b>Saturday 15<sup>th</sup></b> 10 am – 3 pm	Rail Motor Society Open Day	An opportunity for the general public to view the operations of the Rail Motor Society Depot and Museum at Paterson	Webbers Creek Road Paterson
<b>January</b>			
<b>Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> - Monday 27<sup>th</sup></b>	Australiana Weekend Celebrations	Bands on stage and jumping castle. Camping & food available Bookings essential.	Lostock Dam Caravan Park
<b>Sunday 26<sup>th</sup></b>	Movie Night Lostock Dam	Movies under the stars on our big screen \$10 per adult & \$5 per child	Lostock Dam Caravan Park
<b>February</b>			
<b>Friday 7<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Karuah River Rally	BMW TC NSW is holding its 37 <sup>th</sup> Karuah River Rally. With some of the states best riding roads sealed or unsealed. The rally is for motorcyclists only.	Barrington Tops Frying Pan Creek, Dungog
<b>March</b>			
<b>Saturday 1<sup>st</sup></b>	Music Shindig	Listen to music by the Bushrock band, Alex Ross & more. Hot food available, tea & coffee & camping. Starts at 3pm	Lostock Dam Caravan Park
<b>Sunday 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Paterson Historical Society celebrates 40 years of operation of its Court House Museum	Between 10am and 4pm there will be special displays featuring river boats, the 1843 town charter and photos of early Paterson. At 1pm the annual town walk will begin, led by Dr Cameron Archer. During the day a new book will be launched, titled Dr Henry Lindeman & Cawarra - Gresford, written by Jack Sullivan.	Paterson Courthouse Museum
<b>Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	5 <sup>th</sup> NHMA National Tractor Trek	The Hunter Valley Vintage Farm Machinery Club Inc. will host the fifth NHMA National Tractor Trek 2014 at Dungog, New South Wales. Witness the tranquil beauty of National Parks and State Forests while travelling on a mix of undulating rural roads and forest tracks.	Dungog & surrounds.
<b>Thursday 20<sup>th</sup></b> 8 am	Walk organised by Dungog Walkers	Tillegherry River walk. Medium 5 kms. Meet at the Dungog Shire Visitor Information Centre. Locals and visitors welcome.	Dungog and Tillegherry River
<b>Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 30<sup>th</sup></b>	2014 Williams Valley Endurance Ride	80 km Endurance Ride and 40 km (with an option to complete 60 km) Training Ride. Also includes 5km, 10 km and 20 km Social Rides. More information at <a href="http://williamsvalleyendurance.com.au">williamsvalleyendurance.com.au</a>	Glen William
<b>April</b>			
<b>Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup></b> 10 am - noon	Guided Heritage Walk in the Barrington Tops National Park	As a 2014 National Trust Heritage Festival event, this walk around Blue Gum Loop will include information about the history of the upper Williams. Cost \$10 adults, \$8 children and \$25 family. <u>Bookings essential.</u>	Starting from the Williams River Day Use Area, Salisbury
<b>Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup></b> 10 am - noon	Guided Heritage Walk in the Barrington Tops National Park	As a 2014 National Trust Heritage Festival event, this walk around Blue Gum Loop will include information about the history of the upper Williams.	Starting from the Williams River Day Use Area, Salisbury
<b>Friday 25<sup>th</sup></b>	ANZAC Day	Service at the monument in town	Paterson
<b>May</b>			
<b>Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> – Sun</b>	Total Field days	Great food and wine, fencing	Total College

When	Event name	Description	Location
4 <sup>th</sup>		demonstrations or the Grand Parade. You can be sure the event will not disappoint. Exhibitors bring all the latest in farming techniques and technologies.	Paterson
<b>Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> - Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> Saturday 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Three Village Art Trail	Will include a broad range of visual arts on display and other activities. A celebration of art in the area.	The Paterson and Allyn valleys
	Raw Challenge – Barrington Tops – Run Camp & party	This course is set to test endurance, strength & determination with activities ranging from 6km course with 15+ obstacles or a 16 km course with 26+ obstacles designed for those wanting more of a challenge. There is also the option to run both days. Live music on Friday & Saturday night. <a href="http://www.rawchallenge.com.au">www.rawchallenge.com.au</a>	Riverwood Downs. Monkerai Valley.
<b>June</b>			
<b>Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> to Monday, 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Music and movie at Lostock	Listen to the music of Lexi Ross and Ash Mountain. Food available. After dark bring a chair or blanket & sit under the stars & watch a feature film on our massive screen.	Lostock Caravan Park, Paterson River Road Lostock Dam Caravan Park
<b>Sunday 8<sup>th</sup></b> (Date to be confirmed)	Back to Back Wool Challenge	It's a race to shear the sheep, spin the wool & knit a jumper in under 8 hours! Entertainment & activities all day including blade shearing, blacksmithing, felting and drop spindle demos. Beautiful handcrafts on sale and refreshment available all day	Total Homestead Total
<b>August</b>			
<b>Monday 11<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup></b>	A4DE Australian off Road Enduro Championships	An amazing four days of fast action amongst off-road tracks. Will be asking Telstra to provide a temporary tower as part of their sponsorship of the event	Dusodie and other parts of Dungog Shire
<b>To be advised</b>	Fresh Film Festival		James Theatre and other venues, Dungog
<b>September</b>			
<b>Friday 5<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Pedalfest	A weekend gathering for cyclists now in its 18 <sup>th</sup> year. More info at <a href="http://pedalfest.org.au">pedalfest.org.au</a>	Dungog area
	Yamaha Sprint and Cross Country Championships	Rounds 13 & 14 of the Australian off-road series of the NSW State titles. Hosted by Dungog Motorcycle Club.	Bonnie Doon Salisbury
<b>Mid September</b>	Giant Car Boot Sale	Organised by Paterson Rotary	Paterson
<b>Sunday 21<sup>st</sup></b> From 9am	Paterson Classic Car and Bike Show	Cars and bikes on display.	King Street Paterson
<b>October</b>			
<b>To be confirmed</b>	Vacy Charity Cutting Horse Event	Includes a camp oven and BBQ, cold drinks and restricted bar. Proceeds to Westpac Rescue Helicopter & Vacy Public School. Free entry for spectators.	Summerhill Rd Vacy
<b>To be confirmed Saturday 25<sup>th</sup></b>	Big Breakfast for Breast Cancer Newcastle to Dungog Charity Bike Ride	BBQ breakfast, raffles, entertainment for the children, live music and more. The 90 kilometre ride from Nobbys Beach car park starts from 6.30am and end at Dowling Street Dungog. The ride is limited to 400 riders with 100 people returning via a pre booked train.	Tucker Park Paterson Newcastle to Dungog
<b>December</b>			
<b>Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup></b>	Paterson New Years Eve celebrations	A family event with food and drink stalls and fireworks.	Tucker Park Paterson