

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:	Horsham Rural City Council
Phone:	[REDACTED]
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Website (if applicable):	www.hrcc.vic.gov.au
Date:	27 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

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.

Horsham Rural City Council

Australian Government Mobile Coverage Programme

Horsham Rural City Council municipality is situated in western Victoria and is the regional centre servicing the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. We are located on the Melbourne and Adelaide corridor and are well serviced by five regional highways as well as the main rail line between Melbourne and Perth. The 2011 census population figures showed 19,279 living within our boundary and further growth is forecast into the future. To support this growth the Council proactively advocate for improved infrastructure including telecommunications services for our business and community sectors.

Installation of the National Broadband Network (NBN) infrastructure within the municipality has commenced as Horsham is a point of interconnect and a vital point for the networks across the region. These infrastructure upgrades help attract investment to our region and help drive growth in regional Victoria.

Recent investments in Horsham include the \$14 million Bayer Crop Science Wheat and Oil Seeds Breeding Centre, one of seven being established worldwide, the \$5.7 million Australian Grain Genebank, due to open mid-2014 and the \$19 million redevelopment of the Horsham Town Hall and Performing Arts Centre is currently underway.



Equitable mobile telephone and data service access is critical to further development and community wellbeing within the municipality. Increased reliance on mobile connectivity and access to information is growing the divide between areas within the community with connectivity and those without.

The Coalition Governments “Mobile Black Spot programme” offers our region the opportunity to resolve communication black holes we have been advocating to resolve for many years.

Whilst co-location of service providers and shared infrastructure is technically achievable it appears commercially unattractive, this option should be included as part of the future arrangements in government policy to ensure that the technological divide between population centres and regional areas is not increased. From a regional development prospective the minimum technical service specification should be equivalent to the standards applied to metropolitan areas across the nation. To allow further business investment in regional areas we require the same access and service standards both nationally and internationally.

The provision of services to regional areas is critical to their economic sustainability. Increased reliance on telecommunications in agriculture, tourism, emergency management and our daily business or household transitions puts regional areas at a competitive disadvantage due to poor access and the lack of competition in the provision of telecommunication services.

Recently the Horsham Rural City was severely affected by the Grampians Northern Complex Fire in the Northern Grampians area. This fire covered over 55,000 hectares and destroyed over 30 homes and had a significant impact on our community members. The lack of mobile phone coverage within the greater Wartook Valley area including Wartook, Laharum and Brimpaen districts highlighted the importance of good communications during emergency operations and recovery. Our community is very thankful that during this disaster no fire fighters or members of the community lost their lives due to the inability to access a basic mobile phone service.

During a regional visit of the affected area on January 18th 2014 Hon Dr Denis Napthine, Premier of Victoria, indicated the State Governments strong support to establish improved communications to the fire affected area.

Unfortunately this is not the first natural disaster to impact our municipality as living within a beautiful natural environment does incorporate some risks but this could be greatly reduced by being provided with what most people believe is now basic community infrastructure.

Despite recommendations to royal commissions and government inquiries, our communities have again suffered additional risk and emergency services impediments continue to highlight the need for improved communications.

The tourism industry utilises mobile telecommunication to market and guide visitors to our region. Whilst our tourism offer includes some of the most beautiful and spectacular aspects of the Grampians National Park this is not matched with mobile connectivity. Our ability to attract and grow further investment is restricted by ineffective mobile and data coverage. Whilst the Grampians region attracts many international guests they are dismayed at the lack of connectivity within the National Parks and surrounding areas compared to other international destination. Our tourism industries ability to recover from devastating natural disasters and their normal conduit of their business would be greatly enhanced with improved telecommunications infrastructure.

Agriculture is fast becoming one of the most technologically advanced industries in Australia, despite some of the lowest levels of phone and data reception in our region. Farmers need up to the minute reliable information, to make informed decisions, and to get the most from efficiency improving technology. The National Broadband Network (NBN) and mobile phone connectivity stand to unlock a huge potential for technology development in this industry.

Horsham Rural City Council identifies agriculture as the largest industry sector in the region in terms of employment, expenditure, gross revenue and regional exports. Given its significance in the local economy, agriculture in the Wimmera Southern Mallee needs to stay attuned to the exciting opportunities existing and emerging in the digital economy.

Working with the Wimmera Development Association and their sponsor Councils, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh, West Wimmera and Northern Grampians Shires, we undertook extensive regional survey work to benchmark the current use of information and communications technology (ICT) in the agricultural sector of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region in 2013.

The "Remote Data Use in Agriculture" project found approximately 50 % of survey respondents in this project rated the potential benefit of all ICT applications surveyed as above average, even where they did not use the technology. This indicates that many respondents are aware of current and emerging ICT in agriculture.

Primary producer ownership of smartphones in the region is above the national average. The two most common barriers to adopting ICT were poor mobile phone reception and low internet speed. Both are critical to harnessing the full ICT benefits that the digital world continues to offer. This is particularly so with respect to services from a mobile device. Improving connectivity will assist in enhancing business profitability and sustaining communities disadvantaged by remoteness.

“Quality mobile service is restricting my profitability by around 4 % to 5 %” (Anonymous Remote Data Use in Agriculture survey respondent, Nov 2012).

The Horsham Rural City Council have for many years argued and lobbied on behalf of the community for an equitable mobile service in the Wartook Valley area. These campaigns have been supported by regional bodies like the Wimmera Development Association and Grampians Tourism as we support their submissions to the Australian Government Mobile Coverage Programme.

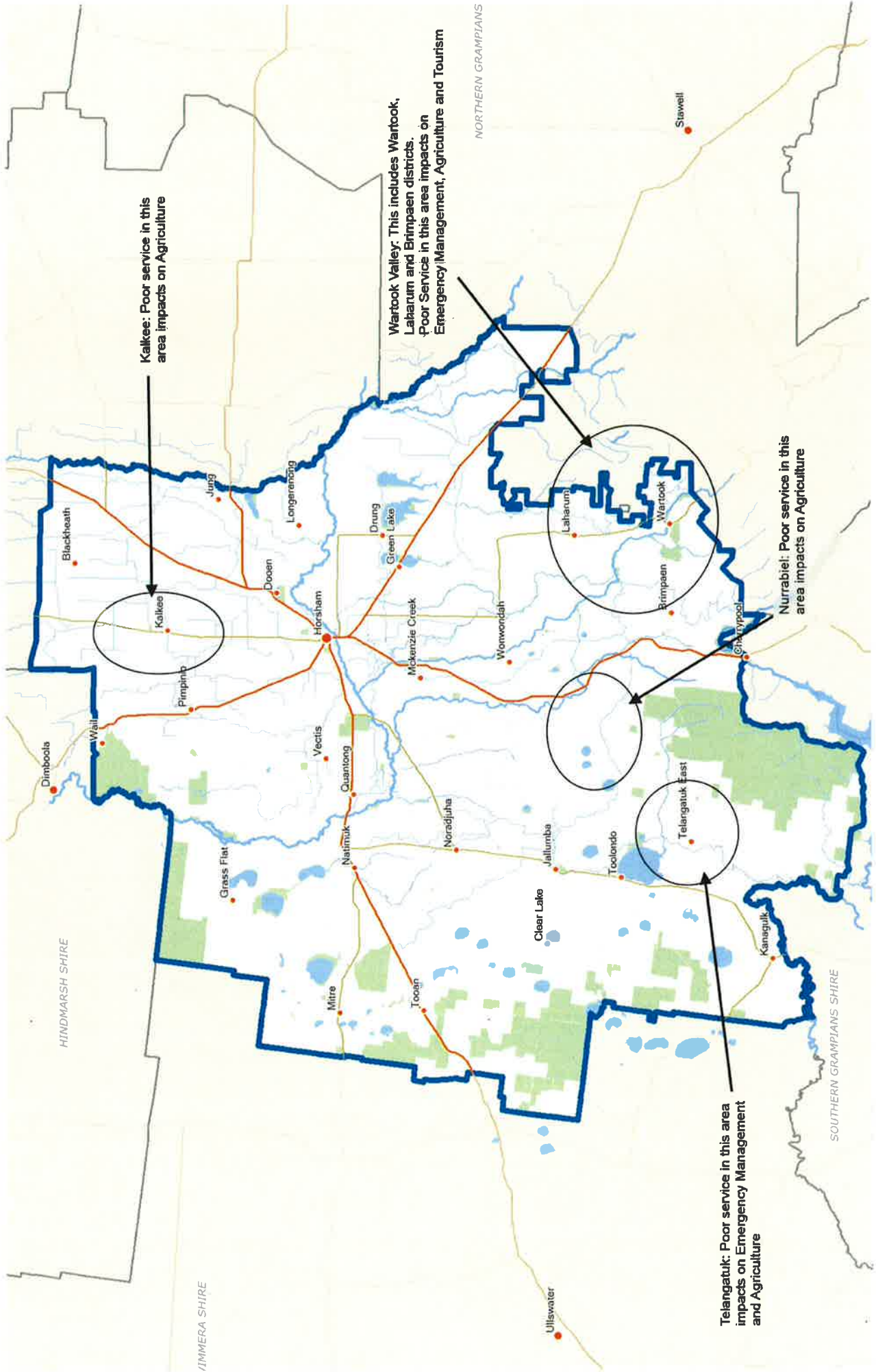
In light of the recent Grampians Northern Complex fires we now request the Government strong support to ensure improved telecommunications infrastructure within the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts in the near future.

Other areas for future consideration include Telangatuk, Nurrabiell and Kalkee districts and these areas are detailed on the attached coverage map.

Appendices

1. Poor mobile and Data coverage map.
2. Letter to Hon Tony Abbott, MP. Prime Minister, Re Grampians Northern Complex Fire and Mobile Phone Coverage.
3. Letter to Hon Dr Denis Napthine, Premier of Victoria, Re Mobile Phone Coverage.
4. Horsham Rural City Council Report, Mobile Phone Coverage in the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen Areas.

We look forward to your earnest consideration of this submission.



Kalklee: Poor service in this area impacts on Agriculture

Wartook Valley: This includes Wartook, Laharum and Brimpaen districts. Poor Service in this area impacts on Emergency Management, Agriculture and Tourism

Telangatak: Poor service in this area impacts on Emergency Management and Agriculture

Nurrabiel: Poor service in this area impacts on Agriculture

NORTHERN GRAMPAINS

HINDMARSH SHIRE

TIMMERA SHIRE

SOUTHERN GRAMPAINS SHIRE

Stawell

Ullswater

Dimboola

Wail

Pimpimb

Kalklee

Blackheath

Jung

Longrenong

Doon

Drung

Green Lake

Horsham

Mckenzie Creek

Wonwondah

Laharum

Wartook

Brimpaen

Charrypsal

Nurrabiel

Grass Flat

Neumuk

Quantong

Vectis

Mitre

Toosan

Noradjuha

Jallumbaa

Toolondo

Clear Lake

Telangatak East

Kansguk



Our Reference: PFB:FOB

29 January 2014

Hon Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

Re: Grampians Northern Complex Fire and Mobile Phone Coverage

I refer to the recent fires in the Northern Grampians area of the Horsham Rural City and the lack of mobile phone coverage in the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts. I wish to strongly state the importance of having mobile coverage in what is a very dangerous fire prone area in the Horsham Rural City.

The recent Grampians Northern Complex Fire has clearly demonstrated the considerable risk that confronted members of the community, CFA staff and volunteers and other agency personnel during the fire that occurred in mid-January 2014.

Our community is very thankful that during this disaster, no fire fighters or members of the community lost their lives due to their inability to access a basic mobile phone service.

The Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts are closely settled farming, tourism and lifestyle communities adjacent to the northern end of the Grampians range. For many years, the community has been pointing out the inherent risks, not only for fire disasters, but also for residents and Tourists in not having mobile phone reception. This part of the Grampians has a considerable influx of tourists accessing the natural beauty of the Grampians National Park all the year round.

The Victorian Premier, the Honorable Denis Napthine visited the fire zone on Saturday 18 January 2014, where he experienced first-hand the incredible destructive nature of the fire emergency that we faced. The Premier has indicated his strong support for mobile phone coverage in the Wartook, Laharum and Brimpaen areas.

Andrew Broad, MP the Member for Mallee also visited the area yesterday and heard first hand the experiences of residents, volunteer fire fighters and farmers. Andrew has expressed his strong support for our community and the need for mobile phone coverage.

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We note the Federal Government's \$100 million mobile black spots program and believe that the needs of the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen should be a very high priority and funded through this program.

The Horsham Rural City request your Governments strong support to ensure mobile phone coverage is extended to the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts in the near future.

Yours sincerely



PETER F BROWN
Chief Executive

cc. Andrew Broad, MP, Member for Mallee; Hugh Delahunty, MP, Member for Lowan; Hon Paul Fletcher, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications

Our Reference: PFB:FOB

29 January 2014

Hon Dr Denis Napthine
Premier of Victoria
Level 1
Treasury Place
MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Premier

Re: Mobile Phone Coverage

I refer to mobile phone coverage in the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts and our previous correspondence to Minister Delahunty in relation to this matter. I wish to strongly reiterate the importance of having mobile coverage in what is a very dangerous fire prone area in the Horsham Rural City.

The recent Grampians Northern Complex Fire has clearly demonstrated the considerable risk that confronted members of the community, CFA staff and volunteers and other agency personnel during the fire that occurred in mid-January 2014.

Our community is very thankful that during this disaster no fire fighters or members of the community lost their lives due to inability to access a basic mobile phone service.

The Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts are closely settled farming, tourism and lifestyle communities adjacent to the northern end of the Grampians range. For many years, the community has been pointing out the inherent risks, not only for fire disasters, but also for residents and Tourists in not having mobile phone reception. This part of the Grampians has a considerable influx of tourists accessing the natural beauty of the Grampians National Park all the year round.

During your visit to the fire zone on Saturday 18 January 2014, you experienced first-hand the incredible destructive nature of the fire emergency that we faced. In conversations with the Mayor and myself, you indicated your strong support for mobile phone coverage in the Wartook, Laharum and Brimpaen areas.

We note the Federal Government's \$100 million mobile black spots program and believe that the needs of the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen should be a very high priority and funded through this program. I attach correspondence to the Prime Minister seeking funding through the \$100 million mobile back spot program.

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The Horsham Rural City request your Governments strong support to ensure mobile phone coverage is extended to the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen districts in the near future.

Yours sincerely



PETER F BROWN
Chief Executive

cc. Hon Gordon Rich-Phillips, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Technology and Minister Responsible for the Aviation Industry; Hugh Delahunty, MP, Member for Lowan; David O'Brien, MLC, Member for Western Victoria

Address correspondence to: Chief Executive Officer PO Box 511 Horsham Victoria 3402
Civic Centre 18 Roberts Avenue Horsham Victoria 3400

Ph 03 5382 9777 **Fax** 03 5382 1111 **Email** council@hrcc.vic.gov.au **Website:** www.hrcc.vic.gov.au

9.1.2 MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE IN THE WARTOOK VALLEY, LAHARUM AND BRIMPAEN AREAS

PF Brown File Ref: F15/A07/000001

Purpose

This report advises Council of recent actions taken in relation to seeking mobile phone coverage for the Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen areas.

Background

This Council has for many years argued on behalf of the community for a better mobile phone service in the Wartook Valley area. The local community has argued strongly and the Wimmera Development Association has taken up the issue on a regional basis.

The arguments for a service are focused in three main areas.

1. The importance of the high fire risk that is evident in the area and the need for secure timely communications to people facing natural disasters and the people who are fighting fires.
2. The day to day use of local residents and farming community. More and more the farming community needs to be able to engage in business discussions while actively pursuing on farm activities away from the homestead.
3. The high number of tourist visits in the area and accessing the natural beauty of the Grampians. Many of these tourists are unaware and surprised by the lack of mobile phone coverage in this area. Tourism operators also need to be able to take phone calls while in the field.

Issues

The Grampians Northern complex fire which started several weeks ago has brought home to many people the incredible risks that were faced by volunteer fire fighters, residents, CFA staff and other agency personnel.

During Premier Napthine's visit to the region he expressed his support individually to the Mayor, Cr David Grimble and to the Chief Executive for mobile phone coverage in the Wartook Valley. The Premier sees this as a priority and will support us in our bid to seek funding through the Commonwealth.

On Tuesday 28 January Council took Andrew Broad, Member for Mallee and David O'Brien the State Upper House Member for Western Region through the fire area and introduced them to a number of local residents who could speak on their experiences as residents, volunteer fire fighters and as farmers in the recent fire.

Mr Broad and Mr O'Brien have indicated their strong support for mobile phone services in this area.

Attached as **Appendix "9.1B"** to this report are copies of letters written to the Prime Minister and to the Premier seeking their support for the construction of a mobile phone tower in Wartook Valley in the near future.

At the same time the Wimmera Development Association and Wimmera Tourism are working on submissions on behalf of the Wimmera and Southern Mallee regions to a Mobile Coverage Program Discussion Paper developed by the Commonwealth Government which seeks input by the 28th February.

Also attached to this report as **Appendix "9.1C"** is correspondence from [REDACTED] a resident of the Wartook Valley who sets out a very clear argument demonstrating the need for mobile phone services.

This issue has had very strong support over a number of years but I believe that given the recent events the local community is clearly of the view that phone coverage must be addressed once and for all to provide a safer environment as the Wartook Valley, Brimpaen and Laharum areas renew and rebuild.

Provided for information of Council.

Moved Cr Clarke, Seconded Cr Phillips that the report be received.

CARRIED

Moved Cr Phillips, Seconded Cr Clarke that Council seek a deputation to meet with appropriate Ministers in Canberra to discuss mobile phone coverage and internet based communications in Wartook Valley, Laharum and Brimpaen as soon as possible.

CARRIED