

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: Yaraka / Isisford Branch of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA)

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Date: 26 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? **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.

Written by [REDACTED]

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association (Aust) (ICPA) is a voluntary, non-profit, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring that all rural and remote students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. ICPA members Work together for equity of access to education for all students who live in rural and remote Australia

The Yaraka / Isisford Branch of ICPA wish to nominate the small, isolated town of Yaraka and its surrounding district as a candidate for funding under the Coalition’s Mobile Black Spot Programme - \$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Programme.

Suitability:

Yaraka lies within the Longreach Regional Council area in Queensland and is located at 24 deg 53.01min South, 144deg 04.71Min East and is situated south of Isisford, east of Jundah and west of Blackall.

Mr. Mark Coulton MP said. *“The funding has two elements. The \$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project will improve mobile coverage along major transport routes, in small communities and in areas that are prone to experiencing natural disasters.” (1)*

Google Earth references Yaraka as being approximately 214 meters above sea level (ASL). (2)

The proposed location of the mobile base station would be Mount Slowcombe (24deg 50.61Min South, 144Deg 03.447 Min East) which is located five kilometers North West of the township of Yaraka.

“There are some locations where the economic viability of expanding the existing network may be marginal but modest government financial support may tip the balance.”(3) The site is already serviced by a sealed road and 240 volt mains power, thus a potentially cost effective partnership has already been established with the provision of some of the necessary infrastructure.

This site which commands a view of the township and the surrounding district is the location of a Telstra High Capacity Radio Concentrator repeater plus a UHF CB Repeater serving the township and district. The elevated nature of the location of Mt Slowcombe (approximately 400 meters ASL) will mean that height of any tower infrastructure required will not be as great as it would be if the tower was located on flat ground. This location therefore has the potential for further significant cost saving.

The nearest Telstra mobile phone network presence is currently located at The Nob Next G base (24Deg 26.74 Min South, 144deg 01.23 Min East) which is situated forty-four kilometers North of the Mt Slowcombe site. As the adjacent mobile phone coverage is supplied by Telstra using Next G (3G 850) technology, users would be best served if any expansion of the mobile network incorporated the same technology as the existing Telstra mobile bases.

Written by [REDACTED]

Bruce Scott MP said, “At 731,297 square kilometres, the Maranoa electorate is larger than some European countries. There are numerous regional and remote communities that don’t have access to adequate mobile phone coverage. Lives depend on mobile phone networks in emergencies, so expanding mobile phone coverage has clear benefits to public safety – as well as to the productive capacity of regional communities.” (4)

Residents of the town of Yaraka and its surrounding community plus travelers and contractors who operate in the area would benefit from any expansion of mobile phone services into the area.

Areas of benefit would include:

Possible Future-proofing of Telecommunications Infrastructure:

There are approximately twenty-eight thousand aging radio type phones, such as HCRC systems in Australia, with the majority in Queensland. Many residents of the Yaraka Community depend on an HCRC system for the provision of a telephone service. Replacement of these aging radio type phones with a mobile service connection would be of great benefit to all subscribers.

The key challenge facing people and communities to increase their online interaction with government, business and each other is the lack of appropriate infrastructure to allow access to the mobile telephone network.

Despite the (previous) Federal Government having stated that, with the introduction of NBN, there will not be a reduction in the standard of delivery of these services and that they do not consider satellite as a suitable method of delivery of a voice service, to date no guarantee has been provided these subscribers will not end with a satellite telephone service.

Safety of Life:

Ensure that all parties who are involved in the provision of services to geographically isolated residents do not make decisions on what type of service will be provided without being 100% aware of the issues associated with the provision of that particular service. For example if HCRC and other systems are replaced with satellite telephones which rely on the NBN Satellite to function, if the internet is down, then so is the phone. **This is a safety of life issue.**

Royal Flying Doctor Service

The RFDS Charleville Base provides a bi-monthly clinic service to Yaraka and the surrounding community. Additionally the all weather air strip located at Yaraka provides a place from which emergency medical evacuations can be undertaken. It is our belief that The Royal Flying Doctor Service is making a submission to the Department of Communications. This submission will detail a need by the RFDS for improved mobile and wireless internet coverage for their clinic areas, including the clinic based at Yaraka.

Written by [REDACTED]

General Community Capacity Building / Retention of population

The ability to use all of the facilities offered by mobile services would boost the ability of users to enter the modern world of communications that is currently denied to them.

The provision of internet services in the district is predominately via Satellite and this greatly restricts availability of some types of activities including video conferencing and tele health. SKYP and VoIP are not available at all or are so unreliable that no one bothers with them as it usually ends in the session having to be abandoned and a waste of time for all concerned.

This is due to the delay inherent in Satellite services. It has been found that if Mobile based Internet is used, these issues disappear. Terrestrial technology does not have the problem of high latency.

Even with access to the NBN Interim satellite, there are increasing reports of congestion, slow internet speeds, drop outs and plans being too expensive to allow reasonable access to places such as YouTube.

Social Media like Twitter is virtually inaccessible. Sure you can Tweet using a computer but the whole point of platforms like Twitter is that it is virtually instant when tweeted from a mobile phone or i device.

Mobile telephone signal would allow for the use of devices like iPads, mobile phones etc. Those who are currently restricted to satellite based internet services can only use some of these devices and that is only via a wireless modem. Mobile phones obviously cannot be used at all and iPads etc only when in range of the signal of the modem. Apps designed for use in the field etc cannot be used except when in range of a wireless modem.

Therefore the provision of a mobile telephone service would allow for residents of the Yaraka community to engage 100% effectively in the digital economy.

This technology would allow devices which are designed to be fully portable to function effectively.

The availability of mobile services will aid in the attraction and retention of the younger members of the population who view the lack of such services as a deterrent to living in a remote area.

Education

This issue impacts not only on businesses and private individuals but also the Queenslanders of tomorrow – the school children.

Written by [REDACTED]

Yaraka Isisford Branch ICPA

Where schooling is delivered via Distance Education, a suitable internet/phone service is also instrumental for the conduct of this form of Education, a large component of which is now virtual and delivered via email and/or internet as well via Teleconferencing.

Local students who study via distance education plus those who study any form of on line adult education such as TAFE courses etc, struggle with poor connectivity, low internet speeds and education delivery platforms which either don't function at all or function poorly using high latency satellite technology. Students who access distance or further education via mobile phone internet data do not have these issues.

The availability of a terrestrial based mobile service will future proof education delivery by delivering low latency voice and internet links which will facilitate good educational outcomes for students in the Yaraka district.

There is also an issue with the employment and retention of young people working in rural and remote locations which do not have access to a mobile telephone service. Young people of the 21st Century place enormous importance on being able to remain digitally connected 24/7 and simply will not engage in employment in areas where such services are not available.

Primary Production / Agriculture

“Improved mobile telephone and data coverage will enhance productivity in the regions.” (5)

This statement is purely rhetorical in the Yaraka district: How can it be said that *“Improved mobile telephone and data coverage will enhance productivity in the region”* when members of the community and businesses will not have access to *improved mobile telephone and data coverage* because of lack of provision of appropriate infrastructure?

Due to economic issues surrounding primary production it is essential that all available tools are made use of to increase productivity. It is not however cost effective for the average producer to implement such productivity improvement schemes due to the high cost of alternative technology (i.e. satellite or other technology.)

Access to a mobile telephone network would allow primary producers to efficiently and economically access a wide range of mobile technology services which are dependent on receiving a mobile signal such as real time monitoring of waters, pumps and/or stock.

Enhanced access to interactive online services such as interactive video conferencing, training seminars etc would be most beneficial to residents of the Yaraka district.

Appropriate access will enable the population to be up-skilled and will assist with the attraction and retention of residents and enable enhanced business productivity.

Written by [REDACTED]

Yaraka Isisford Branch ICPA

Access to many of these services is severely compromised if using a satellite based service and some remain totally unavailable.

The ability to carry a mobile telephone at all times would greatly increase personal safety for those working in the rural industry. This would allow immediate access to such emergency services as 000 and the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the event of an accident or similar emergency.

Tourism

The roads in the Yaraka area are long and relatively isolated and the safety net of a mobile service would assist travelers and emergency services providers such as the Police and State Emergency Service.

Tourists have advised that they are unwilling to travel into areas without mobile coverage, so the provision of a service will make the area more attractive to them.

As previously stated Yaraka lies within the area of the Longreach Regional Council and is featured in a brochure produced by the LRC which advertises three "Self Drive" tours showcasing this wonderful part of outback Queensland.

Sealing of the road from Jericho to Windorah is an on-going project being undertaken by a combination of a number of local government authorities including the Barcaldine Regional Council, the Longreach Regional Council, the Blackall/Tambo Regional Council and the Barcoo Shire Council. This major road development has the potential to greatly enhance travel in the area, for both locals and tourists alike.

The provision of a mobile telephone base station on Mt Slowcombe will be of great benefit to all who use this road, both currently and at some future time. Increasingly, tourists are not venturing to area where there is no mobile telephone coverage.

All concerned would benefit from the increased levels of safety provided by a mobile telephone network and the Yaraka economy (which is currently under great pressure from many years of prolonged drought) would benefit financially from tourist dollars

Conclusion:

"We need assurance of dependable telecommunication services for Yaraka, which is a town that delivers several social and essential services such as emergency services, education and health."

(6)

Historically geographically isolated residents of rural and remote Australia, including members of the Yaraka community, have been forgotten when decisions have been made which will impact on their future, the future of their children, their business and their communities. Clearly

Written by [REDACTED]

this fact is recognised by the current Government. *“Inadequate mobile phone coverage disadvantages individual communities and the wider national economy”*. (7)

Funding must be made available to provide infrastructure which will enable the residents of the Yaraka and district community and well as those who may work in or pass through the area to take advantage of the facilities offered by a modern mobile telephone service.

On behalf of the members of the Yaraka/Isisford Branch of ICPA, we ask that you please accept this submission in accordance with Recommendation 3.2 of the 2011 – 2012 Regional Telecommunications Review which discusses *“focusing on priority regions with selected community input.”* (8)

Bibliography

(1) Mark Coulton MP Media Release 17 December 2013

(2) Google Earth Elevation Data

(3) The Coalition’s Mobile Black Spot Programme (August 2013) Page 3

(4) Bruce Scott MP Media Release 14 January 2014

(5) The Coalition’s Mobile Black Spot Programme (August 2013) Page 6

(6) Susan Glasson, President, Yaraka Sports and Progress Association

(7) The Coalition’s Mobile Black Spot Programme (August 2013) Page 3

(8) The Coalition’s Mobile Black Spot Programme (August 2013) Page 5

Written by [REDACTED]

Yaraka Isisford Branch ICPA