

# 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:	Gil Hopkins
Name of organisation:	Laharum Hall Committee
Phone:	
Email:	
Website (if applicable):	
Date:	22/2/14

#### 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):*

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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.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Laharum Hall Committee is made up of representatives from many groups from Laharum, Wartook and the surrounding area who use the Hall. It is a Committee of Management auspiced by Horsham Rural City Council. Laharum Hall Committee works to improve community participation and capacity.

During 2005/6 the Laharum/Wartook wider community participated in a Community Building Initiative and with the support of the Victorian Government and Horsham Rural City Council developed a Community Plan. This plan identified the essential need for better mobile and wireless broadband services. In the 2010 Community Plan Review the lack of adequate mobile phone and broadband coverage was identified as a major impediment to development and safety in the area. Since then there have been meetings with providers and requests made through various organisations including Wimmera Development Association, Horsham Rural City Council, Tourism bodies and Country Fire Authority, with no satisfactory result. However, it should be noted that many other issues identified in both Community Plans have now been resolved through community, Council and State Government action, while mobile and internet services have since deteriorated.

The Laharum/Wartook/Wartook Valley area and its surrounds into the Grampians National Park is a mobile coverage "Black Spot" area. Mobile coverage in this area is essential for the following reasons

- The area is recognised as a high fire danger area, with 3 extremely major bushfires in the last 4 years.
  - Any landlines were burnt out in the fires and not replaced for many days.
  - Residents could not be warned of approaching fire.
  - Fire personnel could not be contacted by residents who were in immediate danger.
  - Fire-fighters actually fighting the fires could not be contacted by their families to tell them their homes were at risk, nor could the fire-fighters contact their families to check on them or organise help for them – and many fire-fighters were on duty for more than 12 hours at a time.
  - After the recent Grampians fire, burnt houses, sheds and fences need to be removed and replaced, and all works are being greatly hampered by lack of mobile coverage. Affected residents cannot contact authorities or service providers or insurance companies. Telstra has used mobile and internet boosters to help BlazeAid at Laharum Oval and the Recovery Centre in Laharum Hall, showing that coverage can be provided at these locations – but it is needed all the time, not just for emergencies and authorities.
- In early 2011 the MacKenzie River, Burnt Creek and other creeks flooded badly during the night
  - Any landlines were inoperable for some days.
  - Residents could not be warned by GWMWater, SES or Wimmera Catchment Management Authority or any person.
  - Affected residents could not contact authorities or family and friends for help, and nor could they be contacted by others to help.
- The Wartook Valley (including Laharum, Wartook, Brimpaen and Dadswell's Bridge) is a major tourist destination with most tourists from cities or from overseas.
  - Tourists have died in the area, have had vehicle and other accidents and have become lost and have not been able to access emergency help.
  - Tourists now use mobile phones and smart phones for most communication including bookings, and for normal business and family contact while touring. Mobile and internet coverage is now essential for tourism businesses to survive. Clients will favour areas with good reception and many clients will not return to areas with limited coverage.
- All local businesses need good mobile and internet services.
  - Home-based businesses are using internet to provide their services or sales, and the satellite internet service is now extremely slow
  - Farmers need internet and mobile services for normal operations including cropping and harvesting
  - Service providers need good coverage for communication with clients and providers
- All residents should have adequate mobile and internet service for normal communication
  - Residents include families with young children, disabled and also aging people that need support services. Some people have had to buy satellite phones because of the poor coverage, but they still have the problem of not being to research available services through the internet.
  - Many people in other areas now do not have landlines, but use their tablets and smart phones for work and social interaction. Residents here should have the same ability.

- Providing adequate mobile phone and wireless internet coverage is an essential investment
  - Australians and visitors now expect to be able to send and receive messages almost all of the time, certainly in areas where there are houses and businesses.
  - Over the next few years the demand and political pressure for adequate coverage will increase, while the costs will probably rise, so it should be done now.
  - Businesses such as GWMWater and Powercor are moving toward remote sensing of meters (supported by millions of dollars of Government funding) so the need has already arrived and adequate coverage will reduce the need for investment in other forms of communication.

Adequate mobile phone and wireless internet needs to be provided through the same program. This may mean more towers or subsidised boosters on homes, or both.

Different communication companies need to be able to provide their services from the same towers or installations. Many phone and internet companies buy 'time' from the installation owner, and this should now mean that all companies should 'allow' service providers to rent/lease their facilities. There are many mobile phone and internet providers, and instead of residents and visitors having to use a particular provider that owns the facility (or not having service), every client should have access. It is very inefficient and costly to have each provider setting up their own specific installations, and indeed, in many areas of Australia (including cities) the Black Spots could be removed if providers allowed 'sharing'.

Yours Sincerely  
Gil Hopkins  
President,  
Laharum Hall Committee