

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:	
Name of organisation:	Local Government Association of the Northern Territory
Phone:	
Email:	
Website (if applicable):	www.lgant.asn.au
Date:	3 April 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.



Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

LGANT Submission to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion paper
Via email to: mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au
28 February 2014

This submission comprises the response by the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) to the Australian Government's *Mobile Coverage Programme discussion paper, December 2013* (The Programme).

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) is the peak body representing the interests of, and providing a voice for, the 11 shire and 5 municipal councils in the Northern Territory. LGANT coordinates activities on behalf of the local government sector as well as performing functions for other spheres of government that are designed to enhance the capacity of local government in the Northern Territory. Local government has a key role in community building and maintaining community amenity and is often in remote areas a service provider on behalf of the Territory and Australian Governments.

This submission highlights barriers that local governments in the Northern Territory face and the benefits that increased mobile coverage in remote areas would generate.

Barriers

Local government in the Northern Territory face three key barriers when looking to engage in programmes such as The Programme.

1. Land Tenure

The Indigenous Land Corporation identifies that 45% of land in the Northern Territory is Indigenous land¹, the vast majority of which falls within eight remote councils. As such, these remote councils do not have tenure over land which may be suitable for the positioning of mobile towers. Councils negotiate long term leases over land which they maintain community facilities on behalf of their communities and potential service providers will have to negotiate similar leases for the instillation of mobile towers.

2. Financial Constraints

The bulk of mobile black spots in the Northern Territory are located in the eight remote council areas.

Grant funding makes a significant contribution to the revenue streams of local government in the Northern Territory, in particular remote Indigenous councils (over 60% in 2012/13 as opposed to less than 15% for Municipal councils). Their inability to generate significant own source revenue is through not only a minimal rate base but the legislative constraints of conditional rating, resulting in an above average dependence on grant funding.

This restriction results in limited capacity to commit discretionary funding to projects due to other competing core service priorities.

3. Low Population Density and Remoteness

¹http://www.ilc.gov.au/~media/ILC/ILC%20Website/Content/Publications/Corporate%20Documents/NT_R_ILS_170608.ashx

The sparse population density of the Northern Territory, particularly in the remote areas, renders many communities not commercially viable for service providers due to high entry costs. Remoteness leads to high installation and maintenance costs for mobile towers. In addition to this the cost of backhaul is also expensive and logistically challenging. Service providers are therefore unlikely to want to invest without significant support from government.

Benefits of increased coverage in remote areas

Despite the barriers to local government engagement in the Mobile Coverage Programme there are significant benefits to increasing the mobile coverage in remote areas all of which will contribute to the Australian Government's 'Closing the Gap Targets'.

1. Disaster management

The north coast of the Northern Territory sits within a cyclone zone. Increased remote access to the mobile network will allow for better dissemination of emergency announcements. Localised flooding often occurs over a very short period of time. The rapid reporting of such events, made easier through access to the mobile network, is essential for ensuring community safety.

2. Economic development and Service Provision

Increased mobile phone coverage to remote communities would encourage economic development. In a report² for the GSM Association, Deloitte found that increases in mobile telephony provides a strong contribution to economic growth globally in both developed and developing markets.

In many remote communities there is minimal access to public telephones and internet access is problematic. Access to the mobile network would give community members greater opportunity to engage with the global community through mobile internet access.

Communication capacity is key to the success of any small business and lack of infrastructure is often a barrier in remote areas. Increased remote mobile coverage has the potential to encourage local small business. It also has the potential to increase engagement in the workforce locally and regionally.

With increased access to the mobile network in remote communities comes better access to services. For example increased access to health services will assist with scheduling and receiving reminders regarding medical appointments and advice (e.g. Health Direct). Businesses that send representatives to remote communities are able to contact them and change plans 'on the fly' as opposed to returning to base and having to travel back to community again.

LGANT encourages the Australian Government to take a more holistic approach and consider the positive impacts of increased remote mobile coverage through The Programme areas and when prioritising black spot locations.

² <http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/gsma-deloitte-impact-mobile-telephony-economic-growth.pdf>