

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

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.

Submission Request

That the Yaraka area be identified as a black spot for mobile phone coverage under the *Mobile Black Spots Project*, and it be included as a potential improved coverage location.

This submission also supports the need to upgrade existing mobile phone coverage along Federal and State highways within the region under the *Mobile Network Expansion Project*.

Introduction

The Longreach Region covers an area of 40,665km² and has an estimated resident population of 4,288 persons. It is located within Central West Queensland which has an overall population of approximately 12,000 persons, covering an area of over 418,000 square kilometres. The Longreach Region includes the towns of Longreach, Ilfracombe, Isisford and Yaraka.

Longreach is regarded as the Capital of the Central West and is recognised as a Major Rural Activity centre in the *Central West Regional Plan* (2009). Longreach enjoys iconic status and is home to the Australian Stockmans' Hall of Fame and the Qantas Outback Founders Museum.

Yaraka, is located approximately 218km south of Longreach, and is located adjacent to Mt Slowcombe. From Mt Slowcombe you can take in views of the Yang Yang range and local grazing lands.

Background

A great deal of infrastructure investment has occurred in the Yaraka area that supports the installation of improved mobile coverage. The former Isisford Shire Council (now part of Longreach Regional Council) participated in various negotiations and asset investment to bring about a mobile tower at Mt Slowcombe. During the period 2003 to 2008, negotiations were conducted with Telstra for improved mobile coverage. As a result of those negotiations, and the subsequent infrastructure investment by both parties, the following outcomes were achieved:

- High Capacity Radio Concentrator (HCRC) tower in place on top of Mt Slowcombe (Telstra);
- 'Neleh' repeater upgraded to a base station (Telstra);
- All-weather bitumen road installed to safely access Mt Slowcombe (Council);
- Power installation to Mt Slowcombe (Council).

The above investment demonstrates the importance the local community and Telstra places on improved coverage for the Yaraka area. Unfortunately, the negotiations between the Council and Telstra did not bring about a mobile phone tower. However, there are various arguments presented in this submission that

identify the need for improved services, including changed circumstances that make this project imperative.

Benefits of Improved coverage for Yaraka

Council understands that the criteria for the installation of mobile phone towers is still being considered. It is also noted that the Commonwealth will prepare a list of areas that have poor mobile coverage, based on representations by community groups and other organisations. Council is seeking recognition of the Yaraka area as having poor service, and requests to be identified as an area or upgrade. The following benefits are presented for consideration:

1. As identified above, a significant amount of investment has already occurred thus reducing the overall installation costs;
2. The existing Mt Slowcombe tower is located in such a high position, terrestrial mobile coverage for the area will be easily achieved;
3. A future upgrade will bring about potential commercial return through the use of possible mobile phone communication services used by a large number of rural properties for monitoring water pumps and other technologies. This includes safety on rural properties through improved mobile services;
4. Royal Flying Doctor Service frequently uses the Yaraka airstrip for medical clinics and mobile services will be a great benefit;
5. Through agreed State Government funding, the Road to Rail project has brought about bitumen upgrades to the Blackall/Emmet/Yaraka/Windorah Road thus increasing current and future traffic numbers particularly tourism numbers and road trains. This flow of traffic brings about the need and demand for improved communication services;
6. Each year, Yaraka stages two major sporting events consisting of over 300 people;
7. Presently, the interim satellite service covering Yaraka has been exhausted resulting in no new connections being granted until a new satellite is installed. A new mobile service will alleviate this problem. This includes improvement to the many children in the region undertaking school through distance education.

Conclusion

This submission is based on needs of the local community of Yaraka and surrounds. It also recognises that existing infrastructure has been installed supporting improved mobile phone coverage. Council and Telstra have invested in these facilities, which will benefit local residents and the travelling public.

Mark Watt
Chief Executive Officer
28 February 2014