

# 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:	Pyrenees Shire Council
Phone:	
Email:	
Website (if applicable):	www.pyrenees.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? **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](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.

# PYRENEES SHIRE COUNCIL

## Submission to the Commonwealth Government's Mobile Coverage Programme discussion paper

February 27, 2014

### **Pyrenees Shire Council submission to the Commonwealth Government's *Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper***

#### **Introduction**

The Pyrenees Shire welcomes the Commonwealth's commitment of \$100 million towards a programme to improve mobile coverage and telecommunications competition in regional Australia.

Council recognises that the internet, mobile phone usage and digital technology developments are rapidly shaping the way that people live and do business. However, it also recognises that for many of our residents, telecommunication services are often unreliable and sometimes non-existent.

Pyrenees Shire Council aims to ensure residents are not disadvantaged simply due to their regional location and have access to telecommunications services of a comparable standard to those in metropolitan areas. Council also believes minimum mobile coverage standards and world standard infrastructure is critical for our local businesses, in particular the tourism, wine and agriculture sectors to remain competitive into the future and for the region to capitalise on its competitive advantages in ICT.

The Mobile Coverage Programme will have a significant impact on the Council's ability to deliver on key objectives of its Growth and Development Strategy, particularly the strategic directions relating to population growth, and providing better access to health, education and training.

The area covered by Pyrenees Shire includes the following major transport routes affected by mobile phone coverage black spots:-

- The Western Highway between Melbourne and Adelaide
- The Sunraysia Highway between Melbourne and Mildura and
- The Pyrenees Highway between Maryborough and Ararat.

There are communities along these routes that are subject to mobile black spots and contain areas prone to natural disasters and emergency response occurrences such as fire and flood. As an example during the current fire season black spot areas that have experienced fire activities include Amphitheatre, Moonambel and Lexton.

All of these factors demonstrate that the Shire deserves consideration in the Government's Mobile Coverage Programme.

#### **Background to Pyrenees Shire**

The Pyrenees Shire is located in the Central Highlands Region of Victoria immediately to the west of the rapidly growing regional city of Ballarat, with our small communities like Waubra, Beaufort and Snake Valley acting as satellite towns.

A number of the Shire's residents are from small towns within 30 minutes commuting time from Ballarat and other settlements like Ararat, Maryborough and Stawell. These residents choose locations in the Pyrenees Shire for lifestyle reasons, which fits with the objectives of the Victorian State Government to decentralize the population from metropolitan Melbourne and alleviate the pressure on the rapid growth of the outer suburban and peri-urban areas.

Population growth in the Central Highlands Region over the past decade has been about 1.8% per annum. In its capacity as a satellite to the larger neighbouring settlements, the Shire is well placed to accommodate a growing population within the region provided adequate infrastructure including telecommunications infrastructure, is in place to achieve this.

The economy of the Pyrenees Shire is predominantly based on viticulture (which brings related cellar door tourism and accommodation), sheep, grains and beef cattle sectors. Latest data available to the Shire at January 2014, indicates that output from these are \$85.8M and \$80.3M respectively, and which jointly provide 35.4% of jobs within the Shire.<sup>i</sup>

In regards to tourism the Shire draws visitors from larger regional cities and towns such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, and the Western Suburbs of Melbourne which are within 1.5 hours travel time.

The Pyrenees Wine Region has become a significant tourism destination and local winemakers host various functions and lunches as well as the area being host to the following major events:-

- Rainbow Serpent Festival with annual attendances of 15,000 people
- Lake Goldsmith Steam Rally up to 10,000- people per annum
- Avoca shire Turf Club hosts three race events bringing annual patronage of between 8,000 and 10,000 people.

With the above factors in mind, it is important that sufficient infrastructure, technology and service delivery supporting telecommunications capacity be provided to allow for predicted increased demand and changing consumer needs, particularly with regard to mobile coverage.

### **Relevance of the region with regard to programme funding**

The unique characteristics and needs of the Pyrenees Shire make it an area of particular relevance to the Government's \$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project. The following provides details of these characteristics and predicted needs in relation to the three main components/criteria detailed in the Mobile Network Expansion Project:

#### **1. Contains a major transport route**

There are three Vic Roads highways that traverse the Shire which provide arterial networks as illustrated in the attached map of mobile phone coverage black spots.

These are The Western Highway between Melbourne and Adelaide, the Sunraysia Highway between Melbourne and Mildura, and the Pyrenees Highway between Maryborough and Ararat.

The Western Highway is the second busiest national highway in Australia, in terms of freight movements (over five million tonnes/annum) but also passenger and commuter vehicles. It is well documented that multiple mobile black spots are situated along the Western Highway which impact on the residents of our Shire when commuting to Melbourne.

The Sunraysia Highway is an integral freight route from North Western Victoria to Melbourne and is critical to movement of the agricultural and wine produce as well as general freight and passenger vehicles.

The Pyrenees Highway provides a link through our Shire from Ararat in the west to Maryborough (and Bendigo) to the east thereby linking South West Victoria to the Central Victorian Region.

Not only are these Highways of major importance, but so too is the rail service between Melbourne, Beaufort and Ararat. Passenger numbers on this route increased 150% between 2005 and 2011 with

patronage exceeding 11 million passengers (in 2011) and are expected to continue to grow as the State Government's Regional Rail Link Project is completed.

There are a number of examples of Pyrenees residents who commute to Ballarat and Melbourne via the Vline rail network for education, health, and professional reasons.

A key aspect of train travel promoted to potential commuters is the ability to work while traveling including using mobile phones and lap tops (requiring internet connection via WIFI). Due to the unacceptable poor mobile coverage experienced by commuters on the Ballarat-Melbourne line, it is virtually impossible to conduct mobile reception dependent activities whilst traveling. The entire line is considered a black spot due to the absence of mobile coverage.

## **2. Small communities with black spots**

Reliable phone and internet access across the Shire is crucial to support the competitiveness of businesses and exporters, such as our wineries and other agribusinesses, small home-based enterprises and the business and tourism sector in general.

The map which accompanies this submission indicates mobile black spots which have been identified by Councils Works Department and Municipal Fire Prevention Officer.

The northern end of the Shire between Landsborough, Moonambel and Avoca contains the nucleus of our wine industry and is a renowned area for mobile black spots.

One of the wineries at Moonambel has advised that they lose ten hours per week in productivity by having to manually follow up on line bookings for their accommodation facilities.

In some cases the wineries conduct their on-line office communications off site in larger towns and cities such as Ballarat which therefore inhibits the potential for jobs growth and productivity in our municipality.

The agriculture sector is similarly impeded by inadequate telecommunications in this area.

In addition to the impact on businesses of unreliable or non-existent mobile coverage, there is also a well recognized desire of communities to increase the social connectivity of residents who live in isolated areas who are remote from family and friends and rely heavily on telephone or internet communication for both social and safety needs. Particularly when the population of the Shire is ageing (30.8% Of the population is aged 60 years or older) and suffer isolation through lack of access to reliable transport.

Small communities in the northern end of Pyrenees Shire are therefore considered a high priority with regard to mobile coverage black spots.

In an attempt to resolve the issue at Moonambel, Council made an approach to a national mobile network operator in December 2011 to build a mobile communications tower on the following basis:-

- *Council commits \$50,000 towards this project. This is paid prior to the construction commencing.*
- *Business Case prepared ( including estimated usage )*
- *Commence construction of Tower in late 2012*
- *Council agree to pay \$50,000 per year for 3 years following completion of the tower.*
- *The first annual payment would be 12 months after completion of Tower.*
- *The business case and usage would be reviewed prior to each yearly payment. If usage was higher than estimated then the annual \$50,000 payment would be reduced to reflect this.*

- *The maximum contribution from Council would be \$200,000. However this figure may be less due to increased usage.*

The offer by Council was not taken up.

### **3. Areas prone to experiencing natural disasters**

Many communities within the Pyrenees Shire have expressed a frustration with the pockets of mobile phone black spots scattered throughout the area, specifically following a number of recent natural disasters including fires in Carngham, Moonambel and Landsborough and flooding throughout the Shire in 2010-11. These events have highlighted the significant gaps in mobile coverage, affecting the ability of emergency services to communicate with affected residents and to ultimately protect both people and physical assets.

#### **Outcome sought/Specific needs**

Pyrenees Shire experiences mobile black spots at a number of locations throughout the municipality as illustrated by the attached map. Of high priority to the Shire is the establishment of a mobile communications tower at Moonambel to support existing agricultural, viticultural and tourist businesses which currently generate jobs and export income, and to unlock the potential for further investment and population growth.

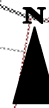
#### **Conclusion**

The Pyrenees Shire welcomes the opportunity to work with the Federal Government to achieve a positive outcome for the northern end of the Pyrenees shire by establishing a communications tower at Moonambel.

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<sup>i</sup> These statistics are made available from Remplan software which uses a combination of ABS and Census data.

# PYRENEES SHIRE MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE BLACKSPOTS AT JAN 2014



Nil or Poor  
Mobile Phone Reception

