

# 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:** Claire Wiseman

**Name of organisation:** RDA Far North

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Email:** [REDACTED]

**Website (if applicable):**

**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):*

--

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.

ABN 94 561 061 743

2a Stirling Road  
Port Augusta SA 5700

p: 08 8641 1444

f: 08 8642 6951

e: [reception@rdafn.com.au](mailto:reception@rdafn.com.au)

w: [www.rdafn.com.au](http://www.rdafn.com.au)

All Postal

Correspondence

PO Box 1762

PORT AUGUSTA SA 5700

28 February 2014

The Manager  
Mobile Coverage Programme  
Department of Communications  
PO Box 2154  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2615

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Mobile Coverage Programme - Submission**

Please find attached a submission from the Far North region of South Australia in regards to the Mobile Coverage Programme.

The information in this document has been compiled from the region and does not necessarily represent the specific view of Regional Development Australia Far North unless specified.

Yours sincerely



Claire Wiseman  
Chief Executive Officer

## **A submission from the Far North region of South Australia to the Mobile Coverage Programme.**

### **Background**

This submission has been compiled by Regional Development Australia Far North (RDAFN) and incorporates input from some regional Local Government partners, those being:

- Port Augusta City Council
- District Council of Coober Pedy.

We understand that other regional Local Government partners will be making separate submissions.

The Far North region of South Australia as per the Regional Development Australia boundaries, covers approximately 80% of South Australia with a land mass of around 800,000sq with a population \*28,212 and incorporates the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. The region takes in the iconic Flinders Ranges and Outback region, popular and well visited tourism destinations in the State. The Flinders Ranges is also now recognised as a National Landscape. \*In the 2012/13 financial year there were 557,000 domestic day visitors to the region worth \$63m in expenditure, 489,000 domestic overnight visitors worth \$228m in expenditure and 43,000 international visitors.

The main townships in the region include (but are not limited to) Port Augusta, Quorn, Hawker, Leigh Creek, Copley, Lyndhurst, Marree, Innamincka, William Creek, Oodnadatta, Marla, Mintabie, Coober Pedy, Glendambo, Pimba, Woomera and Roxby Downs. Some of these remote townships are between 800-1,000 kilometres from Port Augusta.

Current mobile phone coverage is as per below in the following areas:

- Stuart Highway, Port Augusta to Glendambo, few Blackspots
- Stuart Highway, Glendambo to 20km south of Coober Pedy, no coverage
- Stuart Highway, 20km north of Coober Pedy to 15km south of Marla, no coverage
- Hawker to Stirling North Road, Blackspots between Quorn and Hawker and Quorn and Stirling North
- Leigh Creek to Hawker Road, various Blackspots including around Parachilna
- Blinman to Hawker Road, various Blackspots including limited coverage at Wilpena Pound
- Strzelecki Track, no coverage
- Oodnadatta Track, no coverage (weak coverage in Marree)
- Birdsville Track, no coverage
- William Creek to Coober Pedy, no coverage from approximately 10km out of Coober Pedy

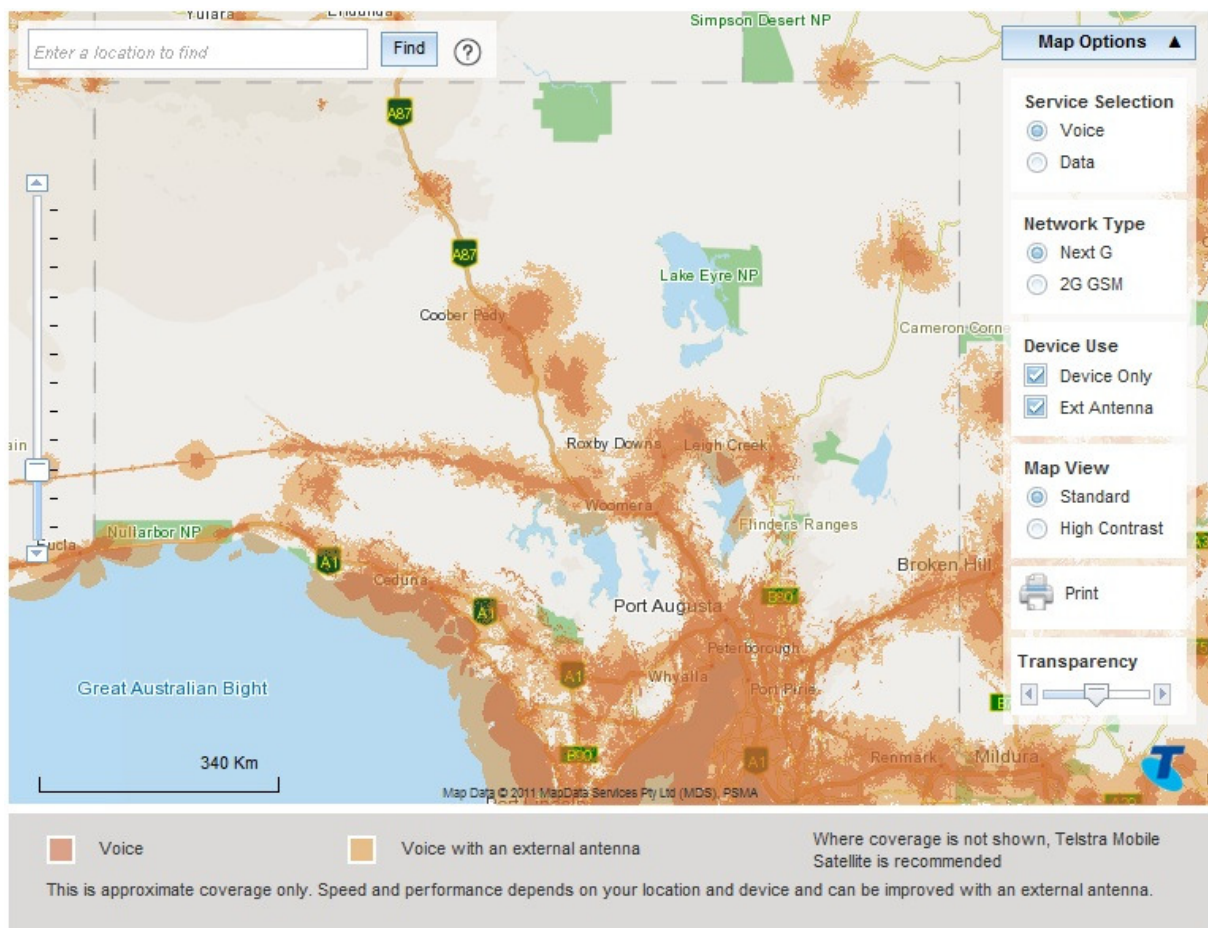
\*source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census Data

\*source: Tourism Research Australia, Regional Profiles, Flinders Ranges & Outback 2012/13

- Oodnadatta to Coober Pedy, no coverage from approximately 10km out of Coober Pedy
- Oodnadatta to Marla, no coverage from just outside of Marla
- APY Lands, no coverage

With such vast and remote regions, communication is essential, especially when in emergency situations. Satellite phone usage is encouraged in remote areas of the region, however, this is very sporadic and is not reliable at all times. It is worth noting that the coverage along the Stuart Highway from Port Augusta to Glendambo (apart from a few blackspots) is due to EDI rail having coverage along their railway lines that others can benefit from, without this, coverage along this route would also be very weak or non-existent in many places.

The below map from [www.telstra.com.au](http://www.telstra.com.au) shows the current Next G coverage for South Australia.



Note that a large part of the outback and remote region has no coverage and as stated above, it is very sporadic along major routes such as the Stuart Highway. The Flinders Ranges is also very scattered and mixed in terms of coverage. This is not only due to the “hilly” nature of the area but also due to the lack of towers. RDAFN has been working with and supporting townships in the Flinders Ranges, such as Blinman in their bid to have their lack of mobile coverage

recognised and improved. Site visits have been made by Telstra with a view to looking to install extra towers in the area to improve mobile telephone communications. At the date of this submission, no further action in this area has been followed up on.

The lack of Next G coverage in many areas of the Far North region does not only affect mobile phones, but also access to the internet. Many outback town residents and businesses rely on being able to communicate with their customers via the internet, however, in many areas this is not a reliable method. Unfortunate changes to the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) at this stage mean that there is no program for the improvement of telecommunication services in many of these areas. This is very disappointing as RDAFN, with funding support from the Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy, carried out a series of roadshows in some of these remote areas promoting the NBN including the rollout timetable and benefits that the NBN will bring to remote communities. Websites were also set up where people could access information regarding the NBN in their township. The unknowns around the NBN rollout in our region now mean that all the effort made to promote the NBN is now irrelevant in some of these townships throughout the Far North SA region. Information on future rollouts is also not available at this time.

As can be understood, in times of emergencies such as road and other accidents, being able to telephone for help is vital. Without adequate and consistent access to land line, mobile or satellite phone coverage, lives can be put at risk.

The below article, which featured in *The Advertiser* on 11 February 2014, highlights some of the residents of remote townships lobbying to improve communications in these areas:

## Track blackspot 'will claim life'

**NATHAN DAVIES**

TOURIST operators have warned people are going to die on the Oodnadatta Track unless something is done about the region's non-existent mobile phone coverage.

William Creek township owner and outback pilot Trevor Wright said it was irresponsible to promote the region as a tourism experience without making it clear there was no mobile phone reception along the length of the track.

Mr Wright said it was only a matter of time before another tourist perished on the track,

where temperatures can climb above 50C during the summer months.

The last traveller to die in the region was Austrian Gabriele Grossmuller, who died after the 4WD she and her boyfriend had rented became bogged near Lake Eyre in 1998.

Mr Wright said both the Northern Territory Government and Federal Government had worked together to significantly improve phone coverage in the NT Outback.

There was no reason why the same thing couldn't happen in South Australia, Mr Wright said. The Govern-

ment really needs to sort this out. (In Europe) the Oodnadatta Track is one of the most advertised remote dirt tracks.

"Europeans really want to see it. But there is a responsibility on both the State and Federal governments to provide some basic safety infrastructure both for our own people and tourists."

Mr Wright said the track's rough conditions, combined with the extreme temperatures, meant blowouts were extremely common.

"We regularly see people travelling without spare tyres," he said. Mr Wright said it was

**TELL US  
WHERE'S THE  
WORST PHONE  
COVERAGE?**

[Advertiser.com.au](http://Advertiser.com.au)

his belief that improved phone coverage could be rolled out along the track for as little as a million dollars.

"If the communities in the region need to kick in some of

that then so be it, but it's the 21st century and we're using a telephone system that was rolled out in the '50s and '60s.

"If we hadn't privatised the telco, then governments would be out here doing what they're supposed to."

Back down the track at Mirree, Oasis Cafe and Roadhouse owner Lyell Oldfield backed Mr Wright's push for better coverage.

"Now that Telstra is a private company they no longer have to look after the little people," he said. "Malcolm Turnbull, if you're listening - we need the phone!"

Rowan Ramsey, the member for Grey, said phone coverage on the Oodnadatta Track, and the SA Outback in general, was an ongoing issue.

"I am of the opinion that what is needed is a long-term commitment to fulfil the 'customer-service obligation' from a new platform," he said.

"I have had a number of discussions with experts in the area and believe that probably the best - and most likely - solution will be to facilitate land-line-like services and possibly limited mobile services using the new NBN satellites, which are due in 2015."

## Responses to Questions

### General

#### **\$80m Mobile Network Expansion Project**

In support of the \$80m Mobile Expansion Project, RDAFN submits the following locations where mobile coverage expansions/improvements should be considered:

- Stuart Highway, whole SA length from Port Augusta to NT border – major transport route
- Blinman Township and surrounding areas in the Flinders Ranges
- Hawker to Stirling North Road – major transport link
- Strzelecki Track, whole length from Lyndhurst to Innamincka – major transport route (especially to Moomba)
- Within outback townships such as Marree, Innamincka, William Creek, Oodnadatta, Mungeranie – major services centres
- Leigh Creek to Hawker Road, full length – major transport route (especially to Moomba) and very popular tourist route to the outback
- APY Lands

Note: Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Rural Traffic Estimates Maps show the Annual Average Daily Traffic Estimates Two Way Flow on the following roads, updated 2 February 2014:

- Stuart Highway, Port Augusta to Pimba = 950 (25.5% commercial vehicles)
- Stuart Highway, Coober Pedy to Marla = 350 (25.5% commercial vehicles)
- Stuart Highway, Marla to NT Border = 260 (34.5% commercial vehicles)
- Hawker to Leigh Creek = 240 (24% commercial vehicles)
- Wilpena Pound to Blinman = 160 (9% commercial vehicles)
- Quorn to Hawker = 500 (17% commercial vehicles)
- APY Lands, Indulkana to Mimili = 66 (15.5% commercial vehicles)