



AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

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AS/MG/ZW GG090

07 August 2018

2018 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat
Department of Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Secretariat

Re: 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review

AgForce Queensland Farmers (AgForce) is the peak rural group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.8 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2015-16. AgForce exists to facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 40 per cent of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

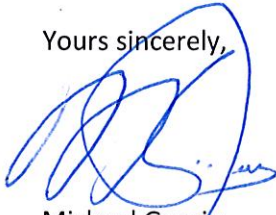
Queensland is the most decentralised state in Australia, and the need for fairer, more reliable and more affordable phone and internet services is a high priority issue for people living and working in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas. Effective, reliable and affordable phone and internet services are an essential part of everyday life, providing an economic and social lifeline for RRR Queenslanders. Telecommunication services are vitally important for community safety, to support business development, enhance children's education and maintain social connections.

The following submission will respond to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2018 Issues Paper and Terms of reference to provide insights into the needs to those living in regional, rural and remote Queensland. Through ongoing interactions with our members, we believe that the most significant impediment to improved uptake of telecommunications and connectivity is access to trusted and independent advice on telecommunications. It is through this submission that we seek to outline AgForce's proposed solution to assisting in increasing attitudes and adoption via the *Telecommunications Innovation Project*.

AgForce requests the Commonwealth Government takes into consideration the recommendations made in the submission attached.

Further AgForce is available to meet at your convenience to discuss our concerns in more detail. Inquiries should be directed in the first instance to Zachary Whale, Policy Director, on (07) 3236 3100.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Guerin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Guerin
AgForce Chief Executive Officer



AUGUST 2018

AgForce Submission

Regional Telecommunications Review 2018 – Issues Paper

INTRODUCTION

AgForce is the peak rural group representing the majority of beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.8 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2015-16. AgForce exists to facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Our members provide high-quality food and fibre products to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 40 per cent of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

Queensland is the most decentralised state in Australia, and the need for fairer, more reliable and more affordable phone and internet services is a high priority issue for people living and working in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas. Effective, reliable and affordable phone and internet services is an essential part of everyday life, providing an economic and social lifeline for RRR Queenslanders. Telecommunication services are vitally important for community safety, to support business development, enhance children's education and maintain social connections.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission seeks to respond to the *Regional Telecommunications Review 2018 Issues Paper* and Terms of Reference and will provide insight on the following areas of interest:

1. How are Regional Australians using telecommunications services?
2. Government Investment
3. Alternative and emerging technologies
4. Rethinking consumer protections and policies.

In July 2018, AgForce surveyed members as part of the Regional Telecommunications Review 2018 National survey seeking insights into their experiences with telecommunications providers and regional connectivity. In total there were a total of 82 responses covering 42 post codes. Of those responses 79 per cent of responses identified as being a farmer, 8.5 per cent as a rural resident and 7 per cent as being a rural business. These findings are referenced throughout our submission and are highlighted at Appendix A.

AgForce, through the surveying of our members and through on-going interactions with our members across Queensland, believes the most significant impediment to uptake of improved telecommunications and connectivity is access to trusted and independent advice on telecommunication services.

This advice must be enabling in the first instance i.e. what products and services are best suited to someone's circumstances; followed by how to maximise benefits through improvements to digital literacy. For some this will be advanced telemetry, for others it may be the ability used cloud-based data warehousing or less sophisticated applications. Irrespective of someone's infrastructure or their digital literacy, if RRR Queensland is to get the most out of improvements to connectivity, they will need independent, trusted advisors to help them along the way.

AGFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government invest in a program to assist those in rural, regional and remote Australia access independent advice on telecommunications options, and provide digital literacy capacity building to ensure the full benefit of rural connectivity is achieved (refer to AgForce's Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP) at [Appendix B](#)).
2. Government to ensure that Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs) can access affordable backhaul and provide internet services where they are the most cost-effective provider.
3. Government continue to invest in and promote co-investment through models like the Mobile Blackspots Program (MBSP).
4. Government ensure landlines or similar non-internet-based voice services is assured through the development of a new Universal Service Guarantee

KEY AREAS OF INTEREST

How are regional Australians using telecommunications services?

What are the main barriers to people in regional communities increasing their use of digital technologies and possible solutions for overcoming these barriers?

AgForce's telecommunication survey 2018 showed that 100 per cent of respondents identified barriers that are preventing the uptake of new technology. Of those identified the following are the five key issues:

1. Internet connection isn't strong enough
2. Don't have access to new technology
3. Too expensive
4. Don't know what new technology is available
5. Don't have technical support

Three of the barriers identified (don't have access to new technology, don't know what technology is available and don't have technical support) all indicate a gap in information and or access for people in rural Australia. Similarly, 'internet connection isn't strong enough', could possibly be overcome through specialist advice or assistance. 'Too expensive' while it is a valid response, highlights the lack of understanding on the benefits to a business in terms of connectivity e.g. less travel due to video conferencing capability, eHealth, education, through to business savings such as water monitors on farm so on). Anecdotally, we are often told that the person that stands to gain the most out of improved connectivity is not the person in the paddock, but often they are the person who is engaged with by service providers. For instance, many women play a large role in education and business management such as book keeping yet may not have the final say on business expenditure. As such, the person making the decision on the investment or ongoing expenses of better telecommunications may not fully understand or may underestimate the social or business impacts.

RRR Australians struggle to access and fully utilise telecommunications technologies as demonstrated in the AgForce 2018 survey. There is a need to bridge the gap between existing telecommunications offerings in RRR Australia and the digital ability of end users to apply these services to improve their lifestyles and businesses. In 2016, AgForce became aware of this pressing digital literacy issue and developed a Telecommunications Innovation Project, aimed at solving this issue, and sought industry and government collaboration. Unfortunately, the project, while supported in-principle and seen as “an important enabler” by telecommunication providers and some within Government, has not received public or private investment. A project outline is at [Appendix B](#).

How are people in regional communities currently using their broadband service and how might they increase the benefits of using this technology?

The internet-based activities in RRR Australia are not dissimilar to that of urban residents. Whilst the connection and bandwidth may differ, business and residential demand for internet-based resources to undertake everyday tasks remains. Like urban users, the transition to mobile and wireless devices is increasing¹ of which the top tasks respondents are using their mobile internet for include:

1. Business tasks - 86.08%
2. Social - 62.03%
3. Learning and Research - 60.76%

As outlined below, the AgForce survey ranked business tasks at almost 70% followed by social and learning and research both at around 50%.

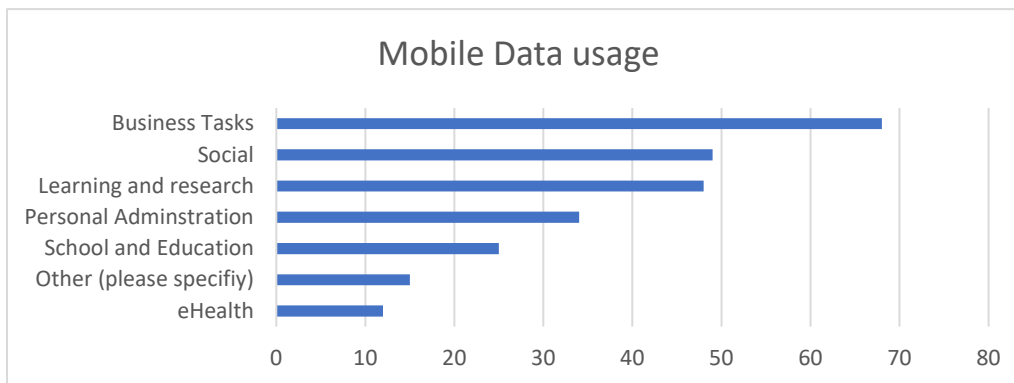


Figure 1 AgForce Survey 2018

In terms of internet usage, the top activities respondents undertake on a weekly basis include:

1. Email - 97.56%
2. Banking – 93.90%
3. Weather Services (e.g. WeatherZone, SprayWise) – 90.24%
4. Commodity Market Reports – 73.17%

¹Telecommunication Service – Australia Market Research Report

<https://www.ibisworld.com.au/industry-trends/market-research-reports/information-media-telecommunications/services/telecommunications-services.html>

What data-intensive activities are occurring in regional, rural and remote Australia? What digital technologies are needed for these?

The Australian agricultural industry is striving towards a farm-gate value of \$100 billion by 2030 (currently at ~\$60 billion). One of the identified enablers of achieving this goal is innovation and new technology. Technology has been identified as overcoming several the expectations of a modern consumer – paving the way for more seamless and gratifying connections with not only Australia’s domestic consumer base but also global buyers of Australian food and fiber products².

For Australia’s agricultural industry to remain competitive globally the productivity gap needs to be reduced. Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) have identified 100 internet of things devices commercially available to the Red Meat industry to increase productivity. MLA have identified digital communication as critical to industry growth³. The Australian agricultural productivity growth rate is averaging at 1.1 per cent⁴ whereas the global rate was 1.7 per cent 2015-16. Investment in and adoption of new technology on farm is critical, and as highlighted in the Precision 2 Decision (P2D) project these technologies can unlock \$20.3 billion in gross value of agricultural production⁵. However, the settings much be right to facilitate this adoption for the full potential to be realised.

CASE STUDY: Bligh Lee Farms, WA

An example of digital innovation positively influencing on-farm productivity is in the case of Darrin Lee from Bligh Lee Farms situated in Western Australia. Darrin’s farm occupies 17,000 acers and like many producers, the time taken to observe the property is consuming and often inefficient. It is through real-time data Bligh Lee Farms has developed probes capable of automatically and remotely measuring soil moisture (first Australian broadacre farmer). The effects of this technology Darrin has noted include:

- Real time information collected seamlessly helped to calculate moisture absorption as well as root growth and plant phenology.
- The data improves crop spraying efficiencies.
- Darrin can access the data from anywhere in the world and determine how much rainfall his property has received, where the rainfall occurred and the growth stage of crops, how much moisture they require and where the moisture sits within the profile¹.

Darrin is only one of many producers who are adopting new on-farm technologies to increase

² Talking 2030: Growing agriculture into a \$100 billion industry

<https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2018/talking-2030-growing-australian-agriculture.pdf>

³ 100 (now 107) IoT devices for the Livestock Industry <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/100-iot-devices-livestock-industry-sean-starling/>

⁴ Agriculture Commodities: March Quarter 2018

http://data.daff.gov.au/data/warehouse/agcomd9abcc004/agcomd9abcc20180306_6R2bY/AgCommodities201803_v1.0.0.pdf

⁵ Technical Report: Accelerating Precision to Decision Agriculture Report 2017

<https://www.crdc.com.au/sites/default/files/P2D%20producer%20survey%20-%20CSIRO%20Final%20Report.pdf>

CASE STUDY: Vera Park, Longreach, QLD

Tony Rayner owns and manages Vera Park, a cattle station in central western Queensland. When Tony first brought Vera Park, remote water monitoring was a foreign concept, however today the property has tapped into this technology. Vera Park is equipped with the uSee Remote Monitoring Camera system⁶ which Tony has noted the following benefits:

- Ability to monitor stock in real time and ensure sufficient water supply.
- Access to system when off farm, opening up more time to conduct other activities which have economic benefit to him and his property.
- Vision of the whole system which allows for greater ability to troubleshoot, for example when an issue occurs Tony is equipped with the information as to where the issue could be prior to stepping foot into the paddock and physically checking each aspect of the system.
- Legitimate visuals through the use of cameras ensures that Tony is reassured that the data he is receiving is reliable and accurate.

Tony is an example of the value technology can have not only to an enterprise bottom-line but also provides opportunities for producers to effectively utilise their time.

To continue to see the adoption of these innovations and further developments in the AgTech space investment into research and development is critical. Interest in AgTech is increasing not only domestically but internationally by investors, entrepreneurs, researchers, corporates, governments and farmers however to ensure Australia's agricultural sector benefits the incentives being the tax and policy settings need to promote ongoing investment.

The Australian agricultural industry is diverse, and no two farming enterprises are the same. Therefore, the technology mix and solutions need to reflect this diversity of enterprises and needs. The current network connectivity solutions aren't standalone and a mixture of fixed and mobile options along with bandwidth is needing to respond to the needs of the Australian agricultural industry.

How can regional businesses better utilise digital technologies maximise economic benefits?

As mentioned previously, digital literacy is vital to maximising economic benefits associated with connectivity. As highlighted by the TIP at [Appendix B](#), assisting those in RRR Australia with both access to connectivity and exposure to the possible application of connectivity are the keys to unlocking maximum economic benefit.

The ability to maximise the economic benefits of digital technologies on farm in the short-term at least is impacted greatly by the poor mobile internet coverage farmers are subjected to. For as the AgForce survey highlighted only 22.50 per cent of respondents are fortunate enough to have 50 per cent or more of their property with constant or reliable internet connection. When this is coupled with the low awareness of

⁶ uSEE Remote Monitoring Report – Sourced: Harrington Systems

digital technology options and the low adoption rate of the industry education is critical to influencing behaviors and practice change⁷.

What skills do people need to get the most from their digital technologies, and where can they learn these skills?

As outlined those in RRR Queensland's reason for access is no different to those living in urban centers, with Australians going online to access education, information, government and community services. Not only are online portals being accessed but online forums and communities are increasing in size. In addition, government agencies are increasingly relying on digital communications, websites and portals to provide information and services previously provided in a more personal way. Digital inclusion is of interest to AgForce for online communities to support the physical fabric of these regions and encourage ongoing engagement. 'Digital Inclusion' as outlined by the *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* is the premise that everyone should be able to make full use of digital technologies⁸. The 'spatial digital divide' is evident across the three sub-indices the index observed: Access, Affordability and Digital Ability.

When observing the state of Queensland this gap has narrowed slightly which is largely due to improvements to access. As income, employment participation and education levels rise so too does the digital inclusion score. However, there the further west a person is situated their score is negatively influenced due to their limited ability to seek out advice and information. Likelihood to take up activities is also negatively influenced due to the limited data packages available.

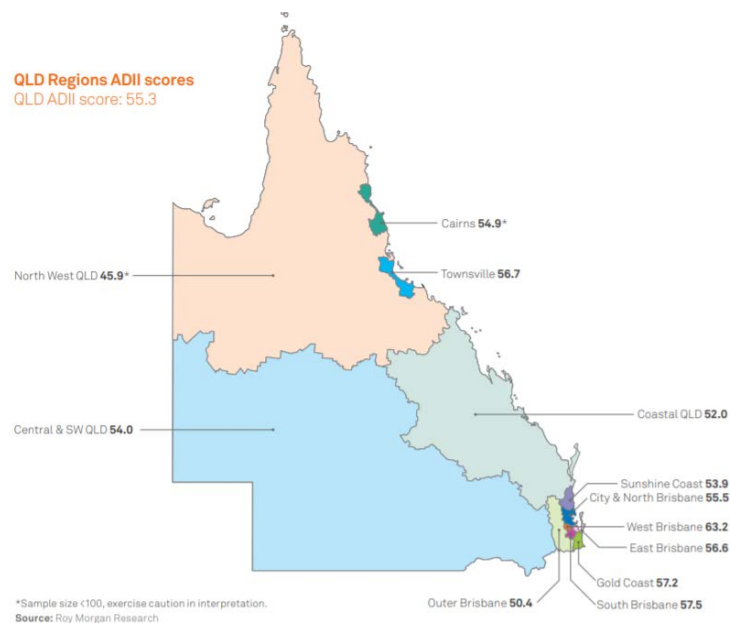


Figure 2 Queensland: Digital inclusion by geography (ADII 2017)

⁷ Technical Report: Accelerating Precision to Decision Agriculture Report 2017

<https://www.crdc.com.au/sites/default/files/P2D%20producer%20survey%20-%20CSIRO%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁸ Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australia Digital Inclusion Index 2017

https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Australian-Digital-Inclusion-Index-2017_v2.pdf

The index highlighted that the *digital ability* of rural Australians is considerably low at 41.5 whereas the capitals scored 49.3. the sub-index of *attitudes* is of interest for in rural Queensland it is 43.9 whereas Brisbane scored 49.8. Attitudes refer to notions of control, enthusiasm, learning and confidence. This supports what was previously mentioned being that those in decision making roles of expenses aren't often the person who benefits from the technology on farm. If the person making these decisions has a lower positive attitude towards digital technology than the ability to encourage adoption is impacted.

Basic skills and activities also scored low in rural Queensland highlighting the role the TIP can in improving the abilities of those residing in RRA Australia.

	Australia	QLD	Brisbane	Rural QLD	Brisbane Regions					Gold Coast	Sunshine Coast	Central & SW QLD	Coastal QLD	Cairns*	Townsville	North West QLD*
2017																
ACCESS																
Internet Access	85.3	84.5	84.5	83.2	82.3	92.0	87.1	83.6	76.6	86.5	82.7	85.5	84.2	85.6	88.2	74.7
Internet Technology	72.1	71.7	72.8	69.7	73.3	74.5	73.5	72.2	66.2	73.0	67.8	71.5	70.5	69.8	75.8	62.5
Internet Data Allowance	51.2	50.9	52.3	47.0	51.5	57.3	52.1	54.1	44.1	52.9	48.7	47.8	48.1	52.2	54.6	40.8
	69.6	69.0	69.9	66.6	69.0	74.6	70.9	69.9	62.3	70.8	66.4	68.3	67.6	69.2	72.8	59.4
AFFORDABILITY																
Relative Expenditure	46.8	46.2	47.9	41.4	48.2	48.7	46.8	46.9	51.0	50.4	48.8	43.6	40.4	41.5	43.7	41.3
Value of Expenditure	58.5	56.9	59.4	52.4	59.6	68.6	57.9	58.6	49.5	59.1	52.3	57.8	51.9	54.0	59.4	44.1
	52.7	51.6	53.6	46.9	53.9	58.7	52.4	52.7	50.2	54.8	50.5	50.7	46.2	47.8	51.6	42.7
DIGITAL ABILITY																
Attitudes	50.1	48.5	49.8	43.9	46.5	59.4	52.6	49.7	40.1	54.0	48.8	47.2	43.6	43.5	48.3	38.8
Basic Skills	53.3	50.9	53.1	47.1	49.7	63.4	54.1	54.0	46.5	49.0	49.4	47.3	49.2	55.7	51.2	37.4
Activities	38.4	36.6	37.8	33.6	34.3	46.1	41.1	38.1	29.6	34.7	36.0	34.2	34.1	44.0	37.6	30.6
	47.3	45.3	46.9	41.5	43.5	56.3	49.3	47.3	38.7	45.9	44.7	42.9	42.3	47.7	45.7	35.6
DIGITAL INCLUSION INDEX	56.5	55.3	56.8	51.7	55.5	63.2	57.5	56.6	50.4	57.2	53.9	54.0	52.0	54.9	56.7	45.9

*Sample size <100, exercise caution in interpretation. Source: Roy Morgan Research, April 2016–March 2017

Figure 3 Queensland: Digital inclusion by geography

When observing where individuals seek out information to increase their knowledge and skills in digital technology learning from the experience of others is favourable. Respondents of the AgForce survey indicated the following:

Options	Responses	
Attending workshops	39.02%	32
Attending field days	25.61%	21
Learning by user experience	92.68%	76
Learning from peers, family and friends	79.27%	65
Delegating to / employing staff who are across the technology	14.63%	12
Online resources e.g. blogs, videos and tutorials	64.63%	53
Contacting a service provider	43.90%	36

Figure 4 AgForce Survey 2018

Learning by user experience and trial and error seems to be the common choice of most respondents along with seeking out advice from those close to the individual (being peers, family and friends). Interestingly 43.90 per cent indicated that they have contacted a service provider for further information.

The Index and the AgForce survey highlight that access and affordability are core to ensuring uptake of digital services, it is important that digital ability not be overlooked. Access in the absence of digital ability will likely lead to not realising the full potential of connectivity.

Government investment

Have you had ongoing issues, affecting your satellite or fixed wireless broadband service. If so, how have you overcome these issues?

As previously indicated 40 per cent of those who completed the AgForce survey are using the nbn connection. When asked to provide feedback of their experiences over the past three years, 44 percent of respondents stated that it had improved, 35 per cent stating it had remained the same with 34 per cent stating that it had become faster.

AgForce sought to understand if respondents have noted a change in their experience with their mobile voice, landline and internet service over the past twelve months of which 86.59 per cent indicated they have experienced an ongoing issue. When attempting to resolve this issue, 75.71 per cent indicated they liaise with their provider directly. Other methods respondents have accessed frequently for advice in seeking to rectify an issue include but not limited to internet searches, asking a family, friend or colleague and looking up a provider's website. 8.57 per cent indicated that their issue was escalated to the ombudsman.

Method	Response
Ring provider direct	53
Internet Search	27
Asked family, friends and colleagues	23
Look up provider's website	20
Go instore to a provider	13
Contact through provider's chat function online	12
Do nothing - I've tried and it's too hard	10
Look for a new service	8
Call the Ombudsman	6

Figure 6 AgForce Survey 2018

Issues raised and experienced frequently over the past 12 months included, slow internet (66.12 percent) connection (59.42 per cent), faulty equipment or line (46.38 per cent). When identifying the length of time, it took of the issue to be resolved over half (53.7 per cent) of issues took more than one month to

resolve, with 20.90 (per cent) of respondents having experienced 6 months of delays. Of those who experienced an issue in the last 12 months 32.35 per cent stated that their problem had not been resolved.

These insights highlight the need for a variety of escalation points to seek to resolve an issue. It is important, that those experiencing issues can turn to a variety of information sources such as a provider's website and the providers helplines. AgForce has recently implemented an escalation process for members who are experiencing issues with Telstra and nbn. This process is for those who have already raised an issue with these providers but have not achieved a suitable resolution.

If you are in an area with access to the Sky Muster satellite service and you have not taken it up, why not?

The survey used to support this submission identified that 40 per cent of people are connected to the nbn of which 90 per cent are connected via SkyMuster Satellite. 58.54 per cent stated that they weren't connected to the nbn. Reasons identified for not being connected included:

- Nbn is not available in our area 39.58 per cent
- Fixed wireless connection not available 10.42 per cent
- Fixed line connection not available 8.33 per cent

AgForce has mapped where those who believe nbn fixed connections and SkyMuster aren't available based upon their self-identified postcode and requests the nbn work with AgForce to identify if this is the case. If these locations are eligible for this service, it is important to identify what barriers are preventing up take.

For those who indicated they are in a nbn serviced region justification for not taking up this service was:

- Tried nbn but it didn't work (6.25 per cent)
- Happy with our existing connection (6.25 per cent)

Of those who indicated they aren't connected 27.08 per cent took the time to indicate other and provide explanations some of which included:

'We have access to a microwave service into the fibre optic system in a regional town for a frightening price. But this is preferable to the fraud of SkyMuster that is slow and patchy and unreliable. Soon we must choose whether to move to 3G/4G when a local tower paid for by a gas company is completed. And the horrors of dealing with Telstra are another drawback.'

'Telstra is refusing to honour my existing contract and migrate me over to nbn.'

'We tried SkyMuster, but it was too expensive with limited downloads which was not suited to our business.'

What economic or social indicators could be used to guide investment to further improve mobile coverage?

While AgForce cannot provide specific economic and social indicators, it appears there is a lack of mobile coverage along our highways and rural roads with the primary focus being on where people live, which leaves large swathes without coverage. Assessing road coverage could be an option to at least ensure people have reception between locations.

Highest demand for data is likely to be greatest in the arable farming areas, so coverage of the cropping areas would be a good indicator of improvement and would also allow for rapid deployment of advanced telemetry/sensors as many cropping enterprises already have GPS systems for controlled traffic/precision agriculture operations.

Is information readily available regarding how to use devices to improve mobile reception in areas with poor coverage? E.g. information about external antenna equipment?

AgForce survey respondents were asked what they have done to improve their mobile data coverage. Many have sought out personal infrastructure investment options including antennas (33.33 per cent), Boosters (28.40 per cent) and repeaters (3.70 per cent). Of those surveyed 40.74 per cent indicated that they have done nothing. This is either due to a lack of awareness or the expense (for which we have received anecdotal evidence).

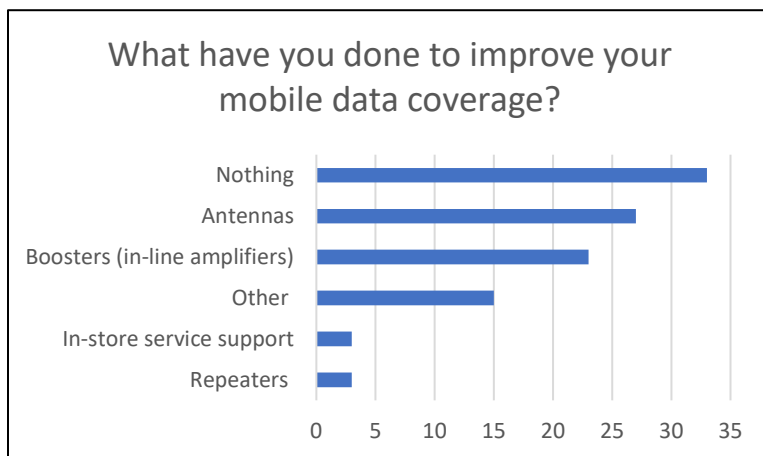


Figure 7 AgForce Survey 2018

Information regarding means of making both improvements to the businesses' or homes' connection are limited especially regarding reliable advice regarding boosters and what is legal. AgForce commends the work of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) for their volunteer efforts in collating and distributing sound advice. However, AgForce raises the concern that without a secure and sustainable model those who are reliant on BIRRR's voluntary services are in jeopardy.

As previously mentioned AgForce has been advocating for the endorsement and support by the Australian Federal government of the Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP). The TIP aims to:

- to relieve, improve and expand the services of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) volunteers to strengthen telecommunications service provision to RRR Australians
- to provide an industry contact for RRR residents who have challenges using telecommunications
- to centralise issues identification and problem solving, and facilitate knowledge sharing across stakeholders, geographical areas and industries
- to maximise use of existing resources of service providers/government and only fill genuine gaps.

More information on the TIP is available at [Appendix B](#).

Alternative and emerging technologies

What emerging digital services will be of most benefit to regional businesses and what are the data needs of these services?

Regional businesses are no different to farming businesses in their requirement for good broadband services. The data needs are just as important. For example, tractor monitoring and servicing will be done remotely from the local dealer. If the dealer or the farmer has a poor connection how can they provide a service to the farmer. What opportunities are being lost due to people in RRR areas not being able to implement or explore alternative technologies due to a lack of knowledge or a lack of connectivity.

What broadband services are people using other than those available through the NBN?

The AgForce survey identified the following alternative internet connections for those not using the nbn network:

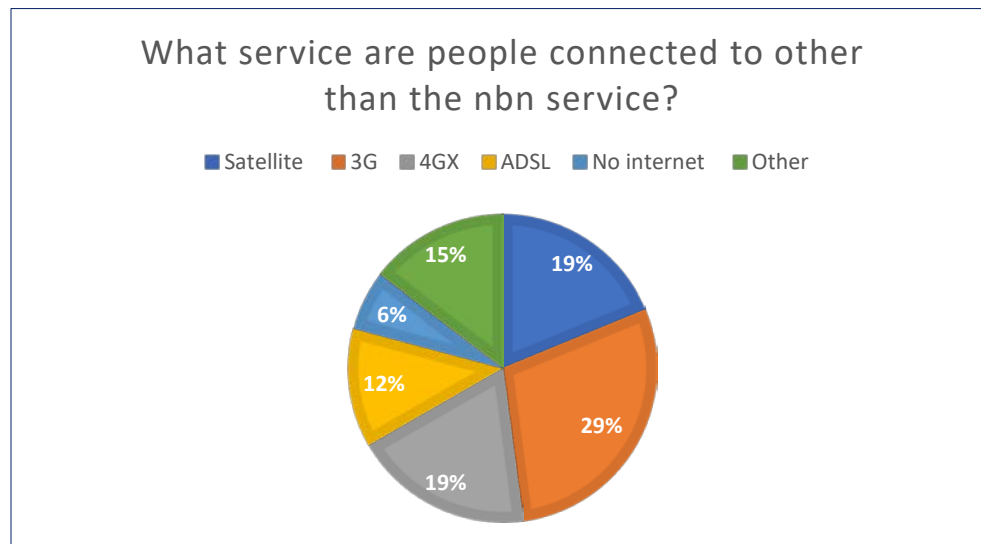


Figure 8 AgForce Survey 2018

Note: 48 people indicated they aren't connected to the nbn service

How can more competition be encouraged in the provision of broadband service in regional Australia?

Australia's telecommunication market has seen considerable transformation over the past five years. Competition in Australian telecommunication's industry is high, and the trend is increasing, however the number of providers accessing regional and rural areas is limited due to the lack of existing infrastructure and high barriers to entry, often, for a low return on investment. Regional consumers ability to identify and take up substitute products is low.

The barriers to entry that exist in the telecommunications space are high, being economies of scale, capital intensity, service differentiation, distribution network development and licensing⁹. Regulation has assisted in removal of some barriers along with government support (i.e. Mobile Black Spot Program) however the industry remains difficult to enter.

It is believed that competition in the wireless internet space is steady and natural market drivers are exhausted. As identified in the IBISWorld report the various indicators associated with this industry are well established and opportunities relate to concentration of the market and industry assistance. Further, ongoing investment by the major providers in this space is not guaranteed. Subscriber growth in Australia is slowing, which is of concern to AgForce and the farming enterprises of Queensland¹⁰, yet consumer demand for new technology is increasing.

Private (Non-government funded) fixed wireless internet service providers (WISPs) have become a staple provider of internet in recent years, often providing high quality internet in hard to reach areas. Unfortunately, AgForce's experience is that WISPs are not always viable, potentially due to the cost of backhaul, a raft of regulatory barriers, and being at the behest of larger providers controlling available backhaul. To provide cost-effective connectivity across RRR Australia, these entrepreneurial and enterprising businesses should be encouraged and supported, not jammed out of the market for fear of them corroding the competitiveness of other larger entities.

To solve telecommunications in RRR, cooperation and multi-faceted solutions will be required, involving government and non-government, large and small. One option proposed by AgForce is a rationalisation of the relationship between distance and price for backhaul, to increase affordability and thus competitiveness in areas that need to access most.

For example, it could be argued that the overall income levels for Telstra need not change, with a small increase in backhaul charges in Brisbane meaning that, due to much smaller net data exchange requirements, RRR centers could enjoy greatly reduced costs. Another, possibly more contentious option,

⁹ Telecommunication Service – Australia Market Research Report
<https://www.ibisworld.com.au/industry-trends/market-research-reports/information-media-telecommunications/services/telecommunications-services.html>

¹⁰ ACMA Communication Report 2016/17 <https://www.acma.gov.au/-/media/Research-and-Analysis/Report/pdf/Communications-report-2016-17-pdf.pdf?la=en>

is for commercial service providers to be able to access grey-data-cables laid for strategic national interest functions, such as government owned lines (police, public service etc.), for buffering high load periods and supplementing backhaul, or access provided to dark fibre networks across regional Australia.

Issues have also been raised around ACMA regulations regarding the provision of wireless broadband with rules and frequencies continuously changing causing increased and unexpected costs. Licensing costs are also an issue for some farmers regarding the frequencies costs for GPS Base Stations. More needs to be done to ensure their ongoing viability rather than a range of impediments which make their success increasingly difficult.

Re-thinking consumer protections and policies

A new Universal Service Agreement

Access and use of a landline service are critical to those living in RRR Australia. 58.54 per cent of those surveyed indicated that they use their landline daily and 17.07 per cent weekly for the top reasons being business, personal/social and emergency. While the traditional copper landline has become obsolete in urban locations, the reliance upon this infrastructure is critical for those situated in RRR. Access to and ongoing provision of a copper line should not be removed from any future Universal service agreements. The AgForce survey indicated 83 per cent of people are reliant upon their landline even when they have access to their mobile and / or internet connection.

As previously indicated, 40 per cent of those who completed the AgForce survey are using a nbn connection and when asked to provide feedback of their experiences over the past three years the results indicated the quality has either improved (43 per cent) or as remained the same (34 per cent). However, when asked for their sentiment towards their service, the results skewed towards 'unsatisfied'

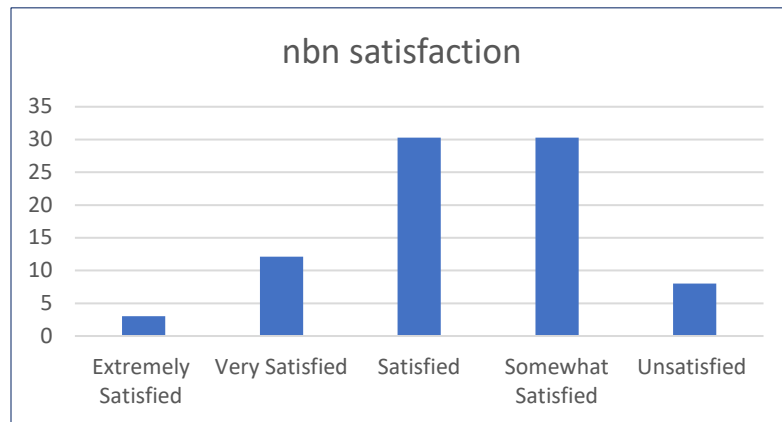


Figure 9 AgForce Survey 2018

Of those who indicated they aren't connected to the nbn (58 per cent), satisfaction towards their internet service solution skewed towards 'unsatisfied', however this was more pronounced. When asked to consider their quality of internet service over the last three years 41 per cent indicated it had become worse.

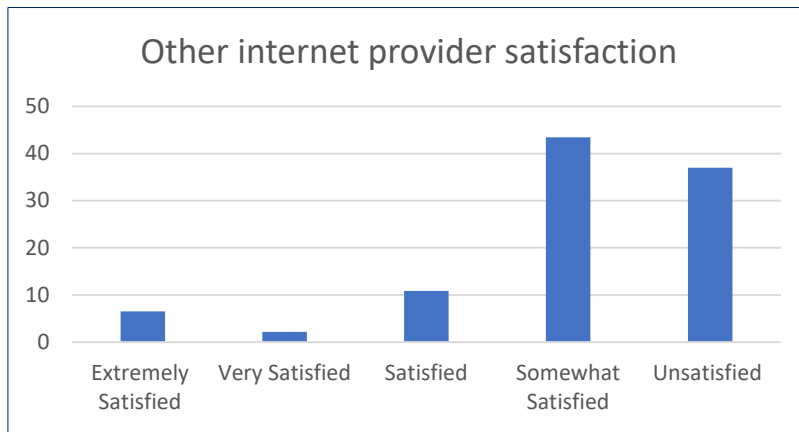


Figure 10 AgForce Survey 2018

Government's policy for the rollout of, and investment in, National Broadband Network

AgForce on the 14 June 2018 provided a statement before the Joint Standing Committee on the roll out of the nbn of which this statement is provided as [Appendix C](#).

Government's policy for the rollout of, and investment in, the Mobile Black Spot Program.

AgForce commends the previous allocations towards the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) and encourages the continuation of this funding towards regional telecommunications. Access to affordable, reliable phone and internet services is one of the biggest issues for those living, working and travelling in the bush.

CONCLUSION

AgForce welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Regional Telecommunications Review 2018 Issues Paper* and the terms of reference. It is important that this review continue to consider the needs, activities and practical reality of all who live in Australia no matter their geographic location. AgForce is willing to discuss further the recommendations outlined in this submission along with the proposed Telecommunications Innovation Project.

Government investment into this digital literacy program that can provide independent advice on telecommunications options will assist RRR Australia in building its capacity to take full advantage of the technologies available now and into the future. In providing access to this independent service, not only will these regions benefit socially but the productivity gains will assist our agricultural industry striving towards the objective of \$100 billion value by 2030.

The role of government in assuring telecommunications is accessible is vitally important and needs to be ongoing. To promote competition and foster digital ability growth, government needs to ensure the

Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs) have access to affordable backhaul along with providing internet services where they are the most cost-effective provider.

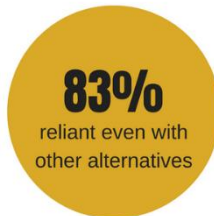
AgForce would like to put on record its appreciation for the support that has been provided by Government and industry towards the Mobile Blackspot Program (MBSP) and would like to seek commitment for the continuation of this investment in, and promotion of, co-investment programs like that of the MBSP model. Finally, AgForce seeks that the government ensures that through the development of the new Universal Service Guarantee, services such as landline or similar non-internet-based voice services are assured.

For any questions or further discussion on this submission, please contact Zachary Whale, Policy Director (whalez@agforceqld.org.au) on 07 3236 3100.

Appendix A

AGFORCE 2018 TELECOMMUNICATIONS SURVEY SNAPSHOT

LANDLINE RELIANCE



11%
ONLY HAVE



100%
IDENTIFIED
BARRIERS
TO NEW TECH
UPDATE

"TOO EXPENSIVE"

"INTERNET CONNECTION
NOT STRONG ENOUGH"

"DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO
NEW TECHNOLOGY"



USER EXPERIENCE



ONLINE
RESOURCES

HOW DO YOU BUILD YOUR DIGITAL SKILLS?



WORKSHOPS



SERVICE PROVIDER

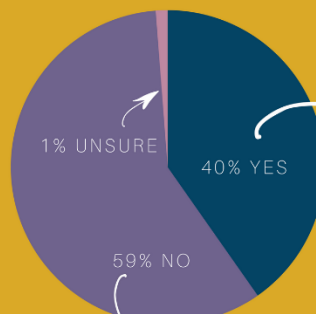


PEERS, FAMILY &
FRIENDS

AVERAGE LANDLINE,
PHONE AND MOBILE
BUNDLE IS...
2015: 49% paid > \$300
2018: 41% paid > \$300



CONNECTED TO THE NBN?



90% ARE CONNECTED
TO SKYMASTER

N/A

40% STATE 'NBN NOT
AVAILABLE IN
MY AREA'

FEELINGS ACROSS THE
BOARD TOWARDS THEIR
INTERNET CONNECTION IS...



HOW DO RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE QLDERS DEAL WITH TELCO ISSUES?



87% of
people have
experienced an
issue with their
mobile or internet
service over the
last 12 months,
with **63%** of
issues have been
resolved either by...



ISSUES

1. SLOW
INTERNET
SPEED

2. CONNECTION

3. FAULTY
EQUIPMENT
OR LINE

Appendix B



AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd

Telecommunications Innovation Project Proposal

August 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AgForce is seeking government commitment and **funding of \$5 Million (+GST) over a period of three years** to deliver a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP). The project will **reach out, educate** and **support** rural, regional and remote (RRR) residents to take control of their connectivity and usage needs. This would involve:

- Step 1: Helping RRR residents understand telecommunications options
- Step 2: Convert connectivity into outcomes for RRR Australia.

We intend to deliver the TIP by:

- opening lines of communications with existing front line and strategic service staff within telcos and government
- nominating representatives for a steering committee to oversee the project
- sharing knowledge/solutions across organisations (with due consideration to commercial sensitivity)
- funding at least **4** knowledge broker and **4** technical support positions in regional Queensland

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT EVOLUTION

AgForce Queensland Farmers (AgForce) is the peak rural group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.8 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2015-16. AgForce exists to facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 40 per cent of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

Rural, regional and remote (RRR) Australians struggle to access and use telecommunication technologies and are therefore missing out on essential services and opportunities that metropolitan users take for granted. There is a need to bridge the gap between existing telecommunications offerings in RRR Australia and the *digital ability* of end users for applying these services to improve livelihoods and lifestyles. AgForce is one of the founding organisations of the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC). AgForce helped initiate the coalition as there is a critical mass of organisations ranging from relatively established lobby groups through to fledgling volunteer interest groups advocating on similar access and service quality issues for rural and regional telecommunications users. The wide-ranging focus and quantum of organisations involved highlights that telecommunications in RRR Australia is critical.

Demonstration of project need

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures the level of digital inclusion across the Australian population and monitors this level over time. Digital inclusion¹ is based on the premise that everyone should be able to make full use of digital technologies – to manage their health and wellbeing, access education and services, organise their finances, and connect with family, friends

¹ Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, Mundell, M & Tucker, J 2016, Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2016, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, for Telstra. See: <http://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-index-report/report/>

and the world beyond. When we look at specific RRR regions, north-west Queensland is the second worst region in Australia, for digital inclusion.

Digital inclusion is made up of three components, Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability. Overall, Queensland ranks sixth out of the eight states and territories for digital inclusion. The most recent ADII report identifies that while Australians report high interest in using the internet, they also find it hard to keep up with new technologies, and relatively few users engage in more advanced activities. This is further complicated by the digital divide that exists between urban and rural users, with Affordability and Digital Ability widening over the last three years.

The ADII advises that there is considerable scope to further improve Digital Ability, particularly for those in RRR areas.

While AgForce recognises the challenge to get people online is critical to innovation in agriculture, possibly more so, are improvements in the ability of RRR users to capitalise on digital technologies. TIP will focus on:

- identifying barriers to, and constraints of, RRR telecommunications usability
- connecting RRR Australians with people who can help them resolve telecoms technical issues
- empowering users to understand their telecommunications needs and options
- collaborating with users and providers to devise solutions for improving business and social outcomes
- sharing these learnings across stakeholders and industries.

The aims of the TIP are:

- to relieve, improve and expand the services of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia ([BIRRR](#)) volunteers to strengthen telecommunications service provision to RRR Australians
- to provide an industry contact for RRR residents who have challenges using telecommunications
- to centralise issues identification and problem solving, and facilitate knowledge sharing across stakeholders, geographical areas and industries
- to maximise use of existing resources of service providers/government and only fill genuine gaps

It is important to recognise this is not just about agriculture, The TIP is a solution that is needed for Regional Queensland. AgForce anticipates the services of this project to be available and utilised by Local Governments, Regional Development Australia Committees and the broader small business community. We have sought support for the project from numerous stakeholders and included with this proposal are these Letters of Support.

Key Activities

The above aims will be achieved through establishing a network of regionally-located knowledge brokers and technical support people. Activities of these people will include:

- fielding enquires from RRR residents about telecommunications usage issues
- helping RRR residents to identify their telecommunications needs (e.g. data/speed/automation)
- providing unbiased advice on options (e.g. technology, plans, hardware, design)
- explaining what technologies are available to residents and who can provide such services

- educating RRR residents on what they can do through their telecommunications service (e.g. government services, health information, practical resources)
- assisting individuals and groups with applying technology options to improve property management;
- collecting and sharing information with all stakeholders.

The TIP will not replace/duplicate telco's existing call centres or technical services. Further, TIP will inform and work alongside government organisations such as ACCAN, the Digital Transformation Office and the Bureau of Communications Research to help advocate for improved telecommunications in RRR Australia.

INDICATORS OF PROJECT SUCCESS

AgForce recognises that RRR telecommunications issues across Australia cannot be addressed all at once. As such, the TIP will be rolled out initially in RRR Queensland only, with the view to upscaling into other states at a future date. AgForce is wellplaced to facilitate this initial project owing to its strong and far-reaching network of members who will benefit from TIP. AgForce aims to provide these commitments for an initial three year pilot with a view to upscaling TIP nationally.

For users	For stakeholders	For Queensland and Australia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to and use of essential resources/services • Greater exposure to and use of business opportunities • Improved well-being and quality of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More satisfied customers • Better meet USGs • Recognition for addressing concerns of public • Improved ROI with increased income from agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of communities through better access to health and education • Increased productivity and innovation in RRR industries • Reduce budget deficit

OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERABLES

TIP will be coordinated by AgForce in conjunction with stakeholders as follows:

	Objective	Activities
Phase 1: Scoping & planning	Capitalise on existing resources, funding and knowledge to ensure only genuine gaps in service provision are filled (6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate and analyse existing data on RRR telecommunication issues (e.g. BIRRR survey, 2016 Digital Inclusion Index, 2015 Regional Telecommunications Review, etc.) • Map existing services provided by telcos/government • Establish formal lines of communication between stakeholders (government organisations, service providers, Agforce). • Establish a steering committee & review/evaluation framework • Appoint knowledge brokers and technical support personnel in locations in regional Queensland
Phase 2: TIP rollout	Promote and rollout TIP in RRR Queensland (6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate knowledge brokers/techs in common issues/solutions • Execute an awareness/promotional campaign through Agforce member networks

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish TIP touch points: 1800 number, website, social media, online chat, printed collateral, physical office, town halls, etc.
Phase 3: TIP Delivery	Deliver, evaluate and continuously improve the TIP (12-24 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge brokers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertake key activities of explaining, helping, advising and supporting RRR Queenslanders re: telecommunications liaise between end users, providers and other stakeholders collect data from stakeholders for evaluation and feedback Extension work to help RRR residents convert connectivity into social and economic outcomes e.g. internet-enabled tech solutions for farmers and landholders
Phase 4: TIP evaluation	Review and upscale (24-36 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upscaling planning into other states Formal evaluation of TIP

AGFORCE KEY CONTACTS

Name	Position	Mobile Number	Email
Georgie Somerset	AgForce Vice President & AgForce Telecommunications Committee Chair	0428 390 984	somersetg@agforceqld.org.au
Zachary Whale	AgForce Policy Director	0427 472 467	whalez@agforceqld.org.au

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

As indicated AgForce has consulted with numerous stakeholders in the development of the TIP proposal. Letters of Support from some of these organisations are included below:



935 Malden Road
Alpha, QLD 4724

birrraus@gmail.com

26th May 2017

To Whom it May Concern

I am writing on behalf of Better Internet For Rural Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) in support of AgForce Queensland's proposed Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP), which aims to reach out, educate and support rural, regional and remote (RRR) residents to take control of their connectivity and usage needs.

BIRRR was founded in October 2014 when many rural families were finding it nearly impossible to run their businesses and educate their children via school of the air due to unreliable, limited and costly internet. BIRRR is operated by five volunteer women who live the data drought themselves, as well as running businesses, farms, families and jobs.

BIRRR quickly grew as word spread and more and more people became desperate to understand and access the ever changing world of technology. While it started out as a lobby and advocacy group, it quickly became obvious that there was a very real need for information sharing and troubleshooting in the very complicated space of RRR telecommunications.

RRR telecommunication is a very complex issue due to low population density heightened by remoteness and isolation. These issues are compounded when RRR end users try and access support and information via call centres, online or Telecommunication outlets which are all urban (or overseas) based and operators/employees have absolutely no concept of RRR telecommunications. This spirals into a frustrating circle of misunderstandings, repeating issues, misinformation and heightens the sense of isolation for RRR end users.

BIRRR has been finding much of the traffic coming through our support group is being driven by RRR end users confusion around what telecommunications are available as well as not understanding their own technology devices, and how to optimise use. As a volunteer group, we find this very draining and that it deflects from our lobbying and advocacy purpose.

We at BIRRR believe that having an initiative such as AgForce Queensland's TIP in place imperative for the well being and future productivity of RRR communities and we wholeheartedly support this.

Regards

Kylie Stretton
BIRRR Co-Founder

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/GROUPS/BIRRR

TWITTER: @fixbushinternet

WEB: www.birrraus.com

4 July 2017

Georgie Somerset
AgForce
PO Box 13186
North Bank Plaza
Cnr Ann and George Streets
Brisbane QLD 4003

Dear Georgie,

Re: NFF supports Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP)

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) would like to voice our support for the proposal by AgForce to roll out a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP).

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is the voice of Australian farmers.

The NFF was established in 1979 as the national peak body representing farmers and more broadly, agriculture across Australia. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the breadth and the length of the supply chain.

The NFF represents Australian agriculture on national and foreign policy issues including workplace relations, trade and natural resource management. Our members complement this work through the delivery of direct 'grass roots' member services as well as state-based policy and commodity-specific interests.

Access to telecommunications and the reliability of telecommunications services are a fundamental issue for people living in rural and regional Australia. These services are not a nice-to-have, but a necessity. Telecommunications are essential for anyone running a business in rural Australia, they keep families and communities in touch and they provide a lifeline in times of emergencies such as natural disasters and medical situations.

There's no point having all of these incredible applications to help farmers, like weed control apps, chemical label readers and GPS devices, if farmers can't get reliable access to the telecommunication network or don't know how to effectively use the technology.

The NFF believes that all rural and regional Australians are entitled to equal access to reliable and affordable telecommunications – and the opportunity to develop their skills in this area.

Telecommunications services, be it phone, mobile or internet, are of vital importance for farmers and rural businesses, and agriculture is a very technologically-savvy industry, yet the use of modern IT in rural Australia has lagged behind due to inadequacies in service, knowledge and infrastructure.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Simson', with a stylized, cursive script.

FIONA SIMSON
President



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia

Advocating for equitable access to education for students in rural and remote Australia

Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)
505 Ryeford-Pratten Rd
MS 422, CLIFTON QLD 4361
FedSecretary@icpa.com.au

Georgie Somerset
AgForce
PO Box 13186
Brisbane QLD 4003
somersetg@agforceqld.org.au

July 17, 2017

Dear Georgie

Re: Letter of Support

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), strongly supports the proposal by AgForce to roll out a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP).

As you are aware, ICPA (Aust) advocates for equitable access to a continuing and appropriate education for students in rural and remote Australia. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

There is currently a gap in understanding, individual problem-solving and knowledge broker services for telecommunications in rural and regional Australia. Rural users are struggling to keep up with changing telecommunications, infrastructure, plans and providers. Rural and remote telecommunication users require support for understanding new internet and phone options and a 'third-party' problem-solving resource to identify best solutions, best providers and best plans in different locations.

Students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia rely heavily on telecommunications to access daily lessons, via both telephone and internet. Most would be in the 0.7% of the population that have no access to any mobile network and the majority would also be in the 3% of the population that will rely on satellite to access the internet. For these students and their families, the offering of telecommunications support services, including advocacy, education and problem solving with technology issues and opportunities, in rural and remote Australia would be of huge benefit. Our members requested this type of service at our Federal Conference last year.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jane Morton
Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)

Ms Georgie Somerset
AgForce
PO Box 13186
North Bank Plaza
Cnr Ann and George Streets
Brisbane QLD 4003

2 August 2017

Dear Georgie,

Re: Letter of support for proposed Telecommunications Innovation Project

Cotton Australia wishes to indicate our support for the proposal by AgForce to deliver a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP).

Cotton Australia is the peak industry body representing Australia's cotton growers. We are a founding member of the Regional, Rural and Remote communications Coalition, an alliance of 19 organisations concerned about connectivity to the bush.

Technology is no longer a luxury, but a necessity to conduct a modern day business able to compete in global markets, as Australian cotton growers continue to do with more than 99% of the crop exported each season. Telecommunications services do not just underpin basic communication anymore, but essential business activities. Poor access to telecommunications and issues with reliability of services are major concerns for our members and the communities in which they live.

Agriculture sets to gain enormously from successful utilisation of 'smart' farming technologies, which are developing at a rapid rate. Australian cotton growers lead the way in efficiency, productivity and innovation and to continue to do so must to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that technology presents. We believe this project will help fast track regional, rural and remote Australia's advancement by improving digital uptake and much-needed problem solving support. It is a broad-reaching project and many communities and industries could stand to benefit from it.

Yours sincerely



Angela Bradburn
Policy Officer, Cotton Australia

21 July 2017

Ms Tamara Badenoch
AgForce
Level 2 110 Mary Street, Brisbane, Qld, 4000
PO Box 13186, North Bank Plaza,
Cnr Ann and George Streets, Qld 4003

Level 1, Unit 8, 107 Boat Harbour Drive
Pialba QLD 4655

p: 07 4124 2526
e: info@rdawidebayburnett.org.au
www.rdawidebayburnett.org.au

RE: Agforce Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP)

Dear Tamara

On behalf of Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett (RDA WBB) I would like to express our support of AgForce's application for \$ 5 million in funding over three years for implementation of the Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP).

AgForce is the peak rural group representing the majority of beef, sheep, wool and grain producers across Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$5.7 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2014/15. AgForce facilitates the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. AgForce members provide high-quality food and fibre products to Australian and overseas consumers, manage more than half of the Queensland landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

AgForce proposes to roll out Telecommunications Innovation Project to reach out, educate and support rural, regional and remote (RRR) residents to take control of their connectivity and usage needs.

TIP will focus on:

- identifying barriers to, and constraints of, RRR telecommunications usability
- connecting RRR Australians with people who can help them resolve telecoms technical issues
- empowering users to understand their telecommunications needs and options
- collaborating with users and providers to devise solutions for improving business and social outcomes
- sharing these learnings across stakeholders and industries.

The aims of the TIP are:

- to relieve, improve and expand the services of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia ([BIRRR](#)) volunteers to strengthen telecommunications service provision to RRR Australians
- to provide an industry contact for RRR residents who have challenges using telecommunications
- to centralise issues identification and problem solving, and facilitate knowledge sharing



across stakeholders, geographical areas and industries

- to maximise use of existing resources of service providers/government and only fill genuine gaps

Rural, regional and remote (RRR) Australians struggle to access and use telecommunication technologies equal to their city counterparts and are therefore missing out on essential services and opportunities these metropolitan users take for granted.

There is a need to bridge the gap between existing telecommunications offerings in RRR Australia and the *digital ability* of end users for applying these services to improve livelihoods and lifestyles.

AgForce is one of the founding organisations of the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC). AgForce helped initiate the coalition as there is a critical mass of organisations ranging from relatively established lobby groups through to fledging volunteer interest groups advocating on similar access and service quality issues for rural and regional telecommunications users.

The wide-ranging focus and quantum of organisations involved highlights that telecommunications in RRR Australia is critical.

The TIP will not replace/duplicate telco's existing call centres or technical services. Further, TIP will inform and work alongside government organisations such as ACCAN, the Digital Transformation Office and the Bureau of Communications Research to help advocate for improved telecommunications in RRR Australia.

RDA WBB supports AgForce in its endeavour to establish this program to help bridge the digital divide.

Should you wish to discuss this support further please contact me directly on 0429 881 697 or via email at scott@rdawidebayburnett.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Scott Rowe
Executive Officer
Regional Development Australia Wide Bay Burnett



Georgie Somerset
AGFORCE
PO Box 13186
North Bank Plaza
Cnr Ann and George Streets
Brisbane QLD 4003

June 7, 2017

Dear Georgie,

Re: Letter of Support

Regional Development Australia – Northern Inland NSW (RDANI) strongly supports the proposal by AgForce to roll out a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP). Access to reliable and affordable telecommunications is a major challenge for many rural, regional and remote Australians, with a lack of reliable connectivity a major inhibitor to business growth, as well as public safety.

Particularly with the continued roll-out of the NBN in regional Australian, it is imperative that rural and remote Australians gain assistance to take control of their connectivity and usage needs, in what is often a complex and confusing space. The TIP focus on identifying barriers, resolving technical issues and empowering users to understand their telecommunications needs and options, will resonate strongly with rural and remote Australian residents and business that face telecommunications barriers on a daily basis.

We applaud the application for this funding by AgForce and see great potential for the project to improve and expand access to vital telecommunications services in the bush. The project may well be a catalyst for a broader national identification of the barriers, resolution of technical issues and the education of users regarding telecommunications needs and options in rural, regional and remote Australia.

Yours sincerely



Nathan Axelsson
Executive Officer



Georgie Somerset
AgForce
PO Box 13186
North Bank Plaza
Cnr Ann and George Streets
Brisbane QLD 4003

July 6th, 2017

Dear Georgie,

Re: Letter of Support

NB-Tec Pty Ltd strongly supports the proposal by AgForce to roll out a Telecommunications Innovation Project (TIP).

NB-Tec is a Consulting and Solutions company primarily focused on better Internet outcomes for the RRR (Rural, Regional and Remote) community. Since 2013, NB-Tec has been active in LTE access and wireless back haul technology solutions and testing. The principals are all telecom industry veterans with a combined 100+ years experience.

Our focus on the RRR community is via active collaboration with AgForce (2016) to develop solution awareness and options for improved internet access. Our solution set drives economy and efficiency for “on-farm” solutions incorporating local area networking, automation and monitoring technologies. NB-Tec has run multiple trials in regional NSW and QLD which have established and proven our solution sets as “Fit for Purpose” and “Keep It Simple” technology.

We have offices in Brisbane and Sydney

Our experience in dealing with the RRR community informs what we deliver as Consulting and/or Solutions. Most of the working RRR community can be described as SME’s which more and more depend on digital communications with government, suppliers, cloud-based applications and general information to support the running of their business.

NB-Tec aligns itself closely to the objectives of AgForce’s TIP and we look forward to continuing our close association

Yours sincerely



Mal Kelly
for and on behalf of
Phil Epthorp
Steve Gardner
NB-Tec Founders

Appendix C



Subject: Joint Standing Committee on the rollout of the NBN in rural and regional areas specifically focused on the capacity and reliability of the satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line networks.

Contact: Zach Whale, AgForce Grains Policy Director, 0427 472 467

Date: 14 June 2018

Opening statement for Joint Standing Committee on the roll out of the nbn

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this inquiry on the rollout of nbn in rural and regional areas.

AgForce Queensland Farmers (AgForce) is the peak rural group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.8 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2015-16 and AgForce exists to facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 40 per cent of the Queensland agricultural landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

Via teleconference, I am joined by Georgie Somerset, AgForce Deputy Chair and AgForce Telecommunications Committee Chair, who is happy to answer any questions you may have pertaining to the role out of nbn services in regional, rural and remote Queensland and to expand on any of the recommendations made by AgForce this afternoon.

While AgForce did not provide a submission to this inquiry we are keen to comment on the Terms of Reference. We would also like to acknowledge the achievements and improvements made by the nbn since its inception, especially through the establishment of nbn local. AgForce, along with other organisations called for the development of such a body, and it is pleasing that it is yielding results. This is not to say that it is a 'silver bullet', although the improvements must be acknowledged.

Specifically, relating to the Terms of Reference, AgForce make the following observations:

a) Planning, mapping and eligibility for satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services;

There is a lack of transparency and consultation regarding which technologies will be provided in a community and if the best option is chosen. Greater involvement of longstanding community organisations such as AgForce, with stable and enduring memberships, can assist in informing planning decisions. While bureaucrats and politicians are continually changing, our links and trust within the community is enduring. For the development of future programs, we recommend that government seek to utilise the knowledge of community organisations and the data they hold. AgForce, for example, not only holds rich spatial data but also the ability to poll our membership on their unique needs and support regional initiatives and infrastructure rollout.

b) adequacy of plans and service reliability of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services;

Since its rollout, the reliability of Sky Muster has improved. The increase to data allowed with Sky Muster has also been welcomed yet it is still considered inadequate for many users. While the announcement to provide a wholesale product for remote and rural businesses via Sky Muster satellite is positive, it illustrates a lack of user understanding at the start of the process. With greater community consultation this could have been incorporated in the initial offering.

c) issues in relation to the future capacity of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services;

It is vital that there is capacity for Sky Muster service provision into the future, as data usage continues to increase. To enable this, Sky Muster should not be the option provided for 'hard to reach' towns and expensive fibre installs. Similarly, we must look at the most cost-effective way to provide connectivity, rather than an arbitrary decision that does not necessarily assess user requirements.

We encourage the nbn to focus on continually increasing its capacity, to ensure that those in regional, rural and remote Australia, can continue to access the data they need. We must strive to ensure that businesses in regional, rural and remote Australia can thrive and capitalise on the opportunities that come from reliable, affordable connectivity, just like their city counterparts. These aspirations must be effectively articulated in the new Universal Service Guarantee.

d) provision of service by alternative providers of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services;

Regional telecommunications will likely be a complex web of mixed technology solutions in the future and we must ensure legislation enables and does not detract from innovation, entrepreneurship and community-based solutions. In this vein, we must not push people into suboptimal arrangements while there are products and services on offer that already meet their needs. Similarly, we must incentivise, not hinder, those providers that have established themselves in certain communities to provide fixed wireless services. Often, these providers offer affordable and cost-effective connectivity and the policy settings should not push them out in favour of larger providers.

We recommend that the funding arrangements for backhaul be reviewed and that funding arrangements are better suited to regional communities. To incentivise investment, cost structures could be inversely proportional to the distance from major centres, as it is the connectivity in rural settings that is most critical.

e) any other related matters

Finally, we believe government should co-fund independent extension services to assist people understand what products and services are available in regional, rural and remote Australia. As this committee would be aware, there are countless examples where people are provided misinformation regarding what services they can access, including the common misconception that they are not entitled to a form of nbn connection. Funding non-commercial and independent extension officers, who provide impartial advice on connectivity, will ensure end-users receive the available service that best suits their needs, rather than the service they are *sold*. Further to this, funding would help with capacity building so once connected, users improve their enterprise based on the latest technology.