

The Department of Communications and the Arts
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Review of the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service submission

The Local Government area of the District Council of Kimba does not currently have access to FTA TV signals from local transmission towers and is therefore entirely reliant on the use of the VAST service. Prior to digital television being introduced from 2010 the community of Kimba was reliant on a self-help transmission station fully maintained by the Council. At this time the existing FTA transmission tower signal appears to circumnavigate Kimba and as a result all residents have had to install the appropriate infrastructure to access VAST services. Whilst initial subsidies were provided by the Government for the implementation of this service ongoing costs are met by residents. Initially only one VAST box was provided to each household meaning any additional boxes required were at the expense of the owner/occupier. These boxes do, at times, require replacement as well as satellite dishes and the LNB signal receivers. Any persons wishing to access the recording facility available with VAST are required to purchase and alternate box at a greater expense. These boxes do have problems particularly when updates are received and often need replacing.

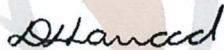
Whilst the VAST Services does, most of the time, provide a quality viewing platform for audiences and a wide variety of channels issues are experienced. If a service is not used for a set period of time the access card inserted within the box requires re-registering. This can be a difficult, lengthy and at times confusing process adding to users' difficulties. Travellers trying to view television when visiting the community must have a satellite dish to access the service. This presents challenges and the signal appears extremely sensitive and difficult to set up. Signal can also be interrupted on cloudy days, rain and other extreme weather events making the service somewhat unreliable. All of these factors add to the inconvenience the VAST service presents.

As identified in the issues paper provided by the Department of Communications and the Arts "television is provided for the purpose of informing, educating and entertaining" yet many Kimba residents believe this is not the case. The biggest concern the Kimba community faces is the lack of local content viewed on the VAST services in the area. One purpose of VAST the issues paper identifies is viewer access to local news. In Kimba local news is non-existent and instead the community receives news from Queensland and Northern Territory. Advertising is also impossible as the main reach of the service is to those areas. Our residents can easily inform you as to what is happening in such towns as Roma which is approximately 1,885km's away. This severely hampers the opportunity of advertising for both local business and community events which in turn has substantial economic implications for the community. It also limits the information available to residents through such occasions as Local Government and State Government elections and state politics in general. In addition it means community members miss out on watching football matches of their local state teams within the AFL competition, footy news and many other sporting and social

events. To avoid this issue residents have two options; paying for a Paid TV service such as Foxtel and/or streaming free to air channels through the internet. These options also have drawbacks. Paid TV such as Foxtel comes at a cost to residents. Internet streaming within the community is, at times, slow, and in particular for rural residents, download limits are not large enough to provide the capacity to enable this. Sky Muster has not solved this problem and as yet NBN is not available in our area, although based on conversations with neighbouring towns accessing this service will not be a solution to the communities' problems.

In summary the Local Government area of the District Council of Kimba faces three main challenges with the VAST service. The cost of maintaining the service, the difficulties and reliability of the service and the lack of local content, the latter which presents the most significant challenge of all.

The Broadcast and Content Reform Package identified in the issues papers refers to reforms which include greater local content obligations for regional commercial television broadcasters. This is something that the Kimba Community would like to see for the ongoing provision of adequate and effective VAST Services.



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