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Coonabarabran - Coolah - Dunedoo - Baradine - Binnaway - Mendooran

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

28 March 2018

seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: The Australian Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into the rollout of the NBN in rural and regional areas.

On behalf of the Council of Warrumbungle Shire I submit the following response to the above Parliamentary Inquiry.

INTRODUCTION:

Warrumbungle Shire is an amalgamated shire; the Coonabarabran and Coolah Shires voluntarily amalgamated in 2006 to form a new shire which is located in North West NSW and covers an area of approximately 12,380 square kilometres of varying terrain from the open farming plains to the rugged outcrops of the Warrumbungle Range in the western part of the shire, to the rolling hills of the Great Dividing Range in the south east.

Within the shire are six (6) towns – Coonabarabran, Baradine and Binnaway and Coolah, Dunedoo and Mendooran.

The population of 9,588 residents is spread across the shire with Coonabarabran, the administrative centre of the shire, having an urban population of 3,174.

The elevation of the shire varies from 300 metres above sea level in the north west at Baradine to 500metres at Coonabarabran; noting that Binnaway is 400m, Coolah is 480m, Dunedoo is 380m and Mendooran 360m.

Warrumbungle Shire Council comprises eight elected members from across the shire who serve a four year term. They have responsibility for managing services provided to our communities through three Directorates (Technical, Development and Corporate and Community) together with Executive Services branch.

As the elected body with responsibility to its constituents the Council of Warrumbungle Shire welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for submissions that relate to the rollout of the NBN in rural areas, specifically focussed on capacity and reliability of satellite etc.

Background:

The high speed NBN is a Federal Government initiative to provide more reliable access to a suite of IT and Communication services for residents (and businesses) and is said to be one of the most advanced technology projects in Australian history; but understanding how it gets to the client is the question on everyone's lips.

At the time Council was informed that all residential and commercial areas, within the town limits would be included in the NBN installation for Coonabarabran. This was reaffirmed with maps etc. Council was not formally informed of the decision to change delivery of the service and only became aware of the changes once they had occurred.

On several occasions the business community, through the Chamber of Commerce, has made representation to council in relation to the matter of NBN connectivity and the Chamber has also coordinated meetings with the State and Federal Local Members to discuss the issues faced by local business in relation to access to telecommunication services and more particularly the NBN.

The NBN was rolled out in Coonabarabran as per the amended schedule but the service is incomplete. Between the CBD and Industrial area is a hill that must not have been factored into planning for the infrastructure.

It is the belief of the wider community that the roll out of the NBN for Warrumbungle Shire has been inequitable and this is reflected in consultations with communities by Council and brings about this less than positive response to the enquiry.

In relation to the Terms of Reference of The Parliamentary Inquiry council provides the following information:

a. A planning, mapping and eligibility for satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services

The decisions around the practicalities of connection of NBN for communities in Warrumbungle Shire have been changed and impact negatively on the delivery of services ; the mapped areas of the original proposal have been corrupted so that the service is no longer considered to meet the needs of the community of Warrumbungle Shire. Several small towns in Warrumbungle Shire, in which industries operate and would be dependent on connection to the NBN for the prosperity and longevity of the projects, do not have NBN connection and are under the impression that they will never get the NBN. Several businesses in these towns have chosen to connect to the NBN satellite but find it to be an unsatisfactory alternative, citing that the service is sporadic at best and dependant on weather conditions. Offpeak satellite usage is neither useful nor viable for residents or businesses whose main hours of operation are 9am to 5.30pm and the service is virtually non-existent despite being the second satellite sent up.

b. Adequacy of plans and service reliability of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services

Medical services and the wellbeing of communities, utilising Telemedicine initiatives is impacted negatively when practising GPs are forced to use inadequate communication links even within the NBN footprint.

As previously stated many operators are not connected to the NBN services because the boundaries of the original proposal were amended; this impacts on the local economy. What is available is seen to be inadequate and the costs of alternative connections prohibitive (*see anecdotes*). Poor access is compounded by slow speed and the unreliable, inconsistent service is impacted by "drop outs" at inopportune times.

In many cases, and more particularly in the southern end of the shire, concerns are raised at the lack of mobile reception and 4G service availability and this poses issues of personal safety and security. The bushfires in Warrumbungle Shire over the past five years present problems with the ineligibility of premises for connection. In many cases rental properties are utilised by families who have been

displaced and have been forced to accept temporary housing; many of these farming families operated farming operations on line and wish to continue to do so as they rebuild their enterprises.

c. Issues in relation to the future capacity of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services

The suggestion that satellite be used does not address the lack of NBN connection and in fact, Council rejects the concept of a return to satellite provision because the satellite access has a capped speed of 25Mbps which is the 2nd slowest in fixed line access and data transfer is much slower with restrictive limits of about 80Gb compared to the fixed line or fixed wireless plans;. Rural and remote satellite users report a poor service at the whim of weather conditions and slow delivery, particularly in high volume usage periods.

Of those areas not within the footprint:

1. The Coonabarabran Industrial Area to the north of the township of Coonabarabran, (bordered by Crane, Gardener, Ulan and Jackson Streets and the Newell Highway and Dows Lane in the east) where there are more than 55 businesses including motor maintenance, light industry, coach services, accommodation providers and fuel suppliers and the residential areas of Hilton Estate (located between Timor Road and the Baradine Road), the Purlewaugh, Timor and River, BingieGrumble and Suttons Roads (within the town limits). The decision not to connect the Industrial Area to the NBN has devastating effects for future development. Industrial land for development and resale is being rejected by potential investors because there is no NBN service available and no commitment to an effective alternative. Businesses in the Industrial Area were informed by the NBN provider that they could either utilise the "old" ADSL systems they currently have or install an NBN compatible satellite, but what was not indicated was that while the ADSL service will not be closed off to them, there would be no further servicing of this aging technology.

Issues of public safety are compromised because the newly completed Emergency Centre of the Regional Fire Service (formerly known as the Bush Fire Brigade) is located within the Industrial Area. It urgently requires efficient communication services. RFS staff were informed that a band connection for NBN was required and so they undertook additional land clearing (tree removal) to make way for a "line of site" of Siding Spring Observatory connection. To date the erection of an alternative source for communication has been a cable linking the centre. This RFS facility is an emergency hub and has the responsibility for working with local volunteer brigades and this alone requires a sound communication service to give and receive advices in times of crisis (which sadly has been too often of late). Recently the staff at the RFS have worked on not one, but three, catastrophic wild fires and there is no question that Climate Variation/Change will see even more fires occur and the importance of an efficient and reliable communications facility is essential to the safety of residential and public property.

Several businesses operate outside the NBN footprint including those located along the Timor and Baradine Roads, the Purlewaugh, BingieGrumble and River Roads and Oxley/Newell Highways. The availability of satellite services in areas not NBN connected is of a poor quality or virtually non-existent and at the whim of weather conditions and is negatively impacted during periods of high volume usage. Businesses located outside the township are still reliant on the ADSL.

Anecdote 1: One business located outside the footprint and who is still using the ADSL, suggests that mobile telephone services should be made effective; he has kept his ADSL service and currently pays \$80/month for unlimited data which is accessible to his whole family; a quick investigation of usage showed he uses about 250gb per month. Should he choose to use a satellite service and access the same data load, the cost would be in excess of \$300 per month; this is inequitable and not a service. It further reduces the small business operator's capacity to contribute to the local economy.

Anecdote 2: A number of private observatories located in the shire are connected to overseas research institutions and are dependent on reliable and efficient telecommunications to transfer live information to international researchers; this cannot be done with a slow and inefficient service and in fact the satellite function delivers delayed information.

d. Provision of service by alternative providers of satellite, fixed wireless and fixed line services

The future of communication models for the shire that include a "boosted" satellite system

will continue to fail to meet the needs of residents (for the reasons listed above) and what this service may look like should be considered prior to any further agreements or installations; there is no question that residents are suspicious of change that may not provide a more efficient service as has occurred with the initial NBN installation.

Council is exploring the services of alternative providers of NBN and while The Field Solutions Group/Just ISP is still reliant on the actual service of Telstra and the current fibre network (Vocus which runs through town), they are offering a service that re directs the connection by bouncing signals from other buildings to "hard to service areas". The company has a history of installation of effective alternatives systems and expertise that comes from a long history of employment in the telecommunications industry. They have worked for Moree Shire and several private AgriBusiness operators. The company is currently working with Goondiwindi and Narromine Shire Councils and private AgriBusiness operators.

Field Solutions presented to Council's Management Executive team (MANEX) on 15 November 2017.

e. *Any other related matters*

As an alternative to the NBN and a more efficient method of communication it may be worth considering the installation of a cellular service which is portable and can be accessed by phone or iPad.

Position .. Warrumbungle Shire Council objects to the installation of an NBN service that is inequitable across the country and more so within the community.

Furthermore Council rejects terminology used that refers to a "service" where businesses are not able to access high speed broad band data services and where alternatives using satellite are inefficient and outdated. This compounds the inequities between communities and jeopardises small business pursuits in rural and regional areas.

Warrumbungle Shire recommends that Telstra as the NBN provider:

1. undertakes a technical survey to ascertain technical problems in all communities (Coonabarabran and Coolah in particular);
2. establish a network of localised repeaters;
3. amend communication materials about their service to an accessible language for community members (eliminating jargon and intensely technical terms etc);
4. undertakes a community survey to determine the "take up" and viability of the NBN in those targeted NBN areas of Warrumbungle Shire;
5. should investigate the installation of a cellular system service of communication for the whole shire; and
6. provide reliable and equitable service for all internet users.

I trust this response to the Inquiry will be accepted in goodwill knowing that the Council has represented the views of its constituents and look forward to a response to the matters raised.

Yours faithfully,

~~Roger Bailey~~
GENERAL MANAGER