

# Telecommunications

## Universal Service Obligation

### Submission

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To Whom it May Concern,

The South Burnett Regional Council's local government area is dependent on the accessibility of telecommunication services for its sustainability and future development needs.

The South Burnett is categorised as a rural, low socio-economic area expanding over 8,421km<sup>2</sup>. The region is located just 2.5 hours from Brisbane and is mostly home to a wide range of user groups mentioned in the issues paper - Regional, Low Socio-Economic, Indigenous, Aging and Disability.

Currently, the South Burnett is reliant on old forms of communication connections, as newer communication methods are not supported or unreliable for use in our region.

As telecommunication connectivity is in our region's best interest, our Economic Development department within Council has taken a strong advocacy role for connectivity. However, we struggle to negotiate much needed equipment with providers because our region is made up of a patchwork of agricultural land, which means a number of areas have few residents living within the required radius as defined by the provider. We understand that this consequently delivers a challenge to meet the financial viability of a private company however those few connections quite often produce a significant amount of income, product and jobs for our region.

We point out some of our main concerns:

- Our main industry of Agriculture has a unique opportunity to produce and export goods, and our Council is keen to progress this opportunity with this industry. However it has been hard to progress and support our community moving forward when our landholders still struggle to connect to the internet for basics such as internet banking or make contact in an emergency situation.
- Our region like many other rural areas has suffered from natural disasters and emergency situations, having major flooding in both major weather events in Queensland in the last decade, regularly encounters severe drought increasing the risk of bush fires etc. In these situations not only do we require the ability to connect to centralised communication points, but require the ability for our population to alert us when they require emergency assistance. Lack of telecommunication infrastructure in this area is cause for concern.

- Having so many identified black spots, we have been very active in submissions for blackspot funding, having spent considerable amounts of our own funds to source and use our own data to prove non-connectivity and ~~call~~ identify our drop out locations. To this day there are still many locations across our region where we are unable to hold a phone call for the full length of the main road. We point out the D'Aguilar highway to Brisbane which still has many locations where a phonecall cannot be made, taken or continued.

Our Council is in a position where if we do not continue to partner in the development of basic telecommunication infrastructure will be unable to develop to take advantage of the trend for businesses to require a global connection. Not having connectivity represents us as a region difficult to do business with or do business from. Here we also highlight future difficulty for our agricultural producers to hold up in the market where streamlining expenses in digital innovation can be the difference between profit and loss.

The issues highlighted above don't even touch on consumers 'outside of business' who use telecommunication to connect to their loved ones, connect to the internet for study, teleconference to a support network or access government services.

As a local government we are acutely aware that our population is suffering as result of insufficient telecommunication infrastructure, and as a Council we have no means to communicate on the level required to negotiate with private providers.

We understand that private companies make business decisions on their financials, but this is where we believe it is the government's responsibility as an independent body representing the population for equitable access.

Whilst we would like to champion the need for telecommunication infrastructure ourselves, we realise we are a local government whose immediate priority is to replace core infrastructure at the end of its lifetime; it is far beyond our Council to be able to negotiate, fund or champion.

Therefore the need of independent advocacy for our region's needs based on consumer needs that won't be supported by financial returns for private companies we ask that a higher level of Government than Local government take on this role.

What our Council will continue to do is advocate for our community, providing independent data that is reinforced by the consumers/community experiences.

Sincerely,

Economic Development Department

South Burnett Regional Council