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8 February 2023

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
GPO Box 3131
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: rmii@acc.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Moree Plains Shire Council submission on the Regional mobile infrastructure inquiry 2022-23

I am writing to highlight our community's need for greater coverage and reliability of mobile phone coverage in regional areas, particularly in North-Western NSW, and stress the importance of this coverage to underpin regional economic growth and improve connectivity during times of natural disasters. I will also endeavour to address some of the key themes as part of this inquiry.

The impact of costs on decision to invest and provide access

Living in regional and remote Australia can come with higher costs of living in terms of services and infrastructure, and Council is mindful of investment costs translating into higher consumer costs for our residents, which could make digital connectivity increasingly unaffordable for households.

Moree Plains Shire Council supports initiatives that provide improved digital connectivity at competitive prices to the residents, businesses, and farms based within our Shire and wider region. We encourage activities which will increase and improve access but also provide globally competitive service quality.

Greater mobile coverage

The Moree Plains 2021-2031 Economic Development Strategy highlights factors such as high-speed digital connectivity and Ag-tech playing critical roles in bolstering Moree's economic growth. Furthermore, Moree Plains Shire is one of the most agriculturally productive regions in Australia and will grow our economic output well past \$1 billion annually over the next 5 years. Our farmers are increasingly reliant on high quality upload and download digital services to increase productivity and manage their resources, especially in this frequent unpredictable climate situation.

Additionally, the Moree Special Activation Precinct coupled with Inland Rail will create an even greater shift towards innovation, with digital connectivity being a critical backbone to support future growth, amenity and prosperity.

Feasibility of providing mobile roaming during natural disasters and emergencies

The Moree Plains is located on a vast flood plain which borders the Queensland border, so we can sometime have two different flood events at similar times within our multiple river systems.

Our recent flood events in Moree and surrounding areas have included a one in 30-year flood in March 2021 and a one in approximately 50-year flood in October 2022, impacting hundreds of homes. Flooding in the Macintyre and Barwon River systems along the NSW/Queensland border include the border communities of Mungindi, Boggabilla and Toomelah, all within the Moree Plains Shire. Recent large flood events for this area were during December 2021 (which included evacuation of Boggabilla and Toomelah residents) and October 2022.

The Moree Plains is home to a proud and large indigenous population of 23% across the Moree Plains Shire. The indigenous village of Toomelah on the NSW/Queensland border, in particular, has very limited mobile phone reception.

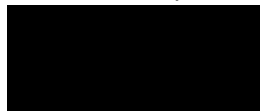
Improved mobile phone coverage in this area could provide an increased awareness of immediate emergency threats and potential risks that impact upon the riverside community such as flooding, bushfires and extreme storms. Please find enclosed attached correspondence from the Toomelah Local Aboriginal Land Council regarding impacts on their community with limited mobile phone coverage. Moree Plains Shire Council has been seeking grant funding through multiple channels to erect a mobile phone tower for the community with limited success to date.

During the flood of October 2022 for Moree township and surrounds, Optus coverage was out for four days, with Telstra out for approximately two days. This is a significant amount of time during one of the largest floods in nearly a decade for our region. Residents in the nearby village of Ashley, 17km north of Moree, were completely cut off by road from Moree and had no access to any mobile coverage.

Mobile roaming during these instances, where flooding can last for several days (we normally experience slow moving water on the flat plains), would support emergency services, including local government as a key responding agency, as well as residents to get the information they need to make informed and safe choices about their situation. Having the ability to transfer to another provider and connect with emergency services, friends and relatives to assist in the emergency response and recovery phase of the flood event would benefit our community immensely.

Moree Plains Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to discuss further actions related to this inquiry and its benefits to Moree Plains Shire. More broadly, we encourage companies within this sector to increase their investment on critical infrastructure within our region and welcome opportunities for collaboration.

Yours sincerely,



Cr Mark Johnson

MAYOR

cc:

Hon Mark Coulton MP

Member for Parkes

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