



ACCC Regional Mobile Infrastructure Inquiry

Australian Grape & Wine
March 2023

Mobile coverage in regional and rural areas

Summary

The availability and adequacy of mobile coverage is an essential precursor to the competitiveness of all agriculture industries. Australian Grape and Wine supports the sentiment in the paper that further investment in infrastructure for the expansion of mobile networks in regional areas is needed and that there are substantial public and economic benefits to be gained from doing so. Australian wine and grape producers have long been known for our progressive and innovative approach to how we operate and what we create. It is this approach that provides our competitive edge in a fiercely competitive global wine market. It is our intention as a sector to maintain and build upon this reputation for innovation. An important enabler is access to the right tools and technologies. As well as providing private benefits to businesses, technologies that support efficiency often provide significant public benefits in improved resource use efficiency.

Grape and wine producers use digitally connected technologies in vineyards, wineries and cellar doors. As the pace of technological advancement escalates, so too does the potential for missed opportunities. Without reliable coverage, businesses will fail to adopt important technologies. Almost all require digital connectivity and mobile phone coverage. Our success is also underpinned by our connections to our customers and to the regional businesses that support us such as tourism operators, accommodation providers and restaurants.

The impacts are felt across the triple bottom line through costs to business revenue, decreased well-being and worker safety, and lost opportunities to improve sustainable resource use and reduce carbon emissions. Even basic technologies such as sensors and telemetry require coverage. More and more we are seeing modern technologies emerge that help us compete with nations with much lower costs of labour. Automation of equipment is an example where there are likely to be significant economic and resource use efficiency gains to be made.

As farmers, grape growers and winemakers are exposed to a broad range of work health safety risks. New technologies that digitise safety inductions, real time incident reporting and tracing of visitors and staff on properties keep people safe. Through keeping us informed they go towards improving compliance in industrial relations, work health safety and biosecurity laws.

Perhaps most importantly is the fact that ability to boost connectivity during emergencies provides a significant safety benefit that can save lives.

how are businesses and consumers impacted by a lack of mobile coverage?

Whether it be for very basic tasks or for the adoption of cutting-edge technology, in today's digital environment, almost all vineyard and winery operators are heavily reliant on their mobile phones. Our consultation with industry provided strong evidence that business disruptions due to poor coverage or network congestion continue to be a problem. The issue impacts business, administration, use of digitally connected equipment and apps and the ability to rely upon new technology that requires connectivity. Most AgTech requires multiple connections through a system of devices as well as connectivity between sensors that detect and capture local data. We have been told that there are numerous examples where the sector has failed to adopt AgTech solutions for no other apparent reason other than poor coverage.

The ability to work remotely from the office almost invariably requires a mobile phone. Poor communications mean owners/managers may need to travel from their work site to provide staff directives, information updates, and to deal with the execution of logistical arrangements.

Lack of coverage has an impact on family life, time management and leaves those with greater health & safety risk more vulnerable. These factors potentially serve as a deterrent for people considering roles in regional and remote areas.

would you support the provision of mobile roaming during emergencies?

Communications in an emergency situation can be life-saving. The potential impact on health and safety in the event of an emergency due to little or no mobile reception leaves people feeling vulnerable. Provision of roaming during emergencies should be made available without question.

where can mobile coverage be improved?

This question was put to the major regional grape and wine associations Australia-wide. Responses suggested that there are coverage issues impacting multiple wine growing regions across Australia and in every State. Those who provided comment included producers and service providers to industry and reference was made to at least fifteen regions, including many of the larger scale grape growing zones. All regional representatives who responded identified issues with black spots in their area including several regions adjacent to satellite townships or within 50km of the major towns.

Other complaints included poor coverage, network congestion, inconsistent service and G3, G4, G5 changes across properties. Lack of competition between providers was thought to be a major contributor to the problem.

Notable regions with on-going issues are:

- Limestone Coast, especially Wrattontully, Padthaway and Robe
- Riverland
- Regional Victoria
- Southern and Highlands NSW
- Remote NSW
- Remote Tas

About Australian Grape & Wine

Australian Grape and Wine is Australia's national association of winegrape and wine producers. Our role is to help forge a political, social and regulatory environment that supports profitable and sustainable Australian wine and winegrape growing businesses. Our activities focus upon the objective of providing leadership, strategy and advocacy support serving businesses both now and into the future. We work in partnership with the Australian Government to develop and implement policy that is in the best interests of winegrape growers and winemakers across Australia.

We represent the interests of the more than 2,500 winemakers and 6,000 winegrape growers, many based in regions. Our voluntary membership covers over 75% of the national winegrape crush and includes small, medium and large winemakers and winegrape growers from across the country. These businesses make a significant contribution to underpinning regional economies by driving growth in jobs, regional exports and food and wine tourism.



FOR INDUSTRY, BY INDUSTRY

Australian Grape & Wine is recognised as a representative organisation for winegrape and wine producers under the *Wine Australia Act 2013* and is incorporated under the *SA Associations Incorporation Act 1985*.

We would like to commend the Australian Government and the ACCC in instigating and executing this inquiry and welcome the opportunity to contribute.

Contact

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