

Rural Women New Zealand

Submission on the Rural Broadband Initiative 2 and Mobile Black Spots Programmes

Introduction

1. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a charitable member based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and advocates on issues that impact on those communities. It welcomes the opportunity to comment in support of the RBI 2 and Mobile Black Spots Programme.
2. Many rural New Zealanders still have poor landline service, have no broadband and cellphone coverage, to have that resolved would be a quantum leap. It must be remembered in times of emergency, adverse events or even in power cuts, the only way for people may be able to communicate is through their landline. The providers should not give up on servicing and improving this service while focusing on the other.

Submission

1. Everyone has the right to fully participate in society (Report to the Royal Commission on Social Policy 1979). Accessible and affordable technology ensures social inclusion for people who are geographically isolated. Social exclusion negatively impacts on a person's wellbeing. Social inclusion has gone beyond the landline.
2. The RWNZ Manifesto states that broadband and mobile coverage are vital to running rural enterprises in a way that is efficient and competitive; a cellphone is a critical safety device in the event of an accident, a crime, an adverse event or other emergency, but there are still large areas of rural New Zealand that do not have this security.
3. The importance of a level playing field when it comes to connectivity should be a given. The fact that it may cost more to achieve high speeds in remote areas should not be a deterrent to providing a service that is equitable (price and service quality).
4. Cellphone and Broadband is essential for our multimillion dollar farming enterprises to work more efficiently, lifting productivity and so become even more economically beneficial to the country. These enterprises have become increasing more technically advanced and has a requirement for real time information for things such as accurate readouts from equipment, alarms, etc, as well as getting fast turn-around information from the companies such as Fonterra.
5. However broadband is essential to rural New Zealand for a myriad of other reasons

Education- Having access to equitable broadband in rural areas is essential for education- to ensure our children are getting access to the information for learning, especially where Correspondence lessons are required. It gives those who live rurally the option of quality distance learning which helps keep both children and adults living rurally yet still getting quality education. In this digital age, those with no internet, on dial up, or on expensive satellite are often disadvantaged when it comes to learning

6. *Health-* having connectivity in rural is imperative for continuity and convenience of services. Increasingly teleconferencing is being used by GP's in their surgery and Specialists in base hospitals to discuss patient management and initiate treatment without the long delays of having to travel for appointments, thus ensuring a better patient recovery. The Mobile Health Surgical Units are dependent on reliable internet services to carry out their work with ease.

7. There are other health uses and the ability and right for the elderly and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes and environment can be assured with the use of technology and the ability to monitor vital signs in the home and relay the information to their GP. Patient Portals are being introduced around New Zealand giving patients the ability to monitor their own health condition with the direct link that will be provided to their GP. This can only be achieved with reliable RBI.

8. Reliable and high-speed broadband and cellphone coverage will encourage more people to move to, or stay in rural areas. Without this connectivity, many are discouraged from applying for jobs in rural areas, or from buying or moving into areas without that connectivity. Without this staffing & community members, rural efficiency is threatened and economic activity affected. While making up only 14% of the rural population the agriculture community contributes significantly to the New Zealand's economic success. As proven with the success of the RWNZ Enterprising Rural Women Award rural is a creative hub for many small businesses, and these businesses rely on good broadband.

9. *Social* - Social benefits to rural communities are very important, being able to connect with others means that being rural doesn't mean being isolated from others. Having access to social media is a vital tool for so many young women who ask questions about health, farming, cooking, and often a plea to meet up with others in their district when they have just moved there. **Only 14% of rural households are farmers** on economic units, the remainder are a mix of life-stylers, hobby farmers, retired, contractors, workers, small business owners, teachers, home care workers and the myriad of other occupations that make up rural communities.

10. Having high speed broadband delivered to rural hubs other than schools such as community halls and marae means that these facilities could be used for a number of purposes for the community, such as for education and health satellite centres, to run seminars and gather the community together to help it grow strong. Having professionals come to the communities would benefit those cannot easily get into town for appointments.

11. Mobile Black Spots are seen as real safety issues for rural farmers, families and communities. Certainly on rural highways there is a need for coverage for accidents, but that need is even more of an issue in the rural heartland. Cellphone coverage is critical here. As our Manifesto states for those living rurally "Cellphones are a critical safety device in the event of an accident, a crime, an adverse event or other emergency." If a person has to leave their home in a hurry due to an emergency or a crime, discover or is involved in an accident, without cellphone coverage they are vulnerable, or often have a long trek to the nearest landline, if that one is working. In the case of a nasty accident the "golden hour" is seen as important- how many accidents have gone too long without treatment because of no cellphone coverage?

12. With the advent smart phones, more and more people rely on them for their real time business information. With the 700MHz frequency even better cellphone coverage could be obtained for our rural communities. Perhaps the RBI 2 would be best spent on well-placed rural cellphone towers to get that coverage to ensure that rural has equity of connectivity- that way both broadband and cellphone coverage would cover a wider area of New Zealand.

In summary

13. Most rural residents' first desire is for great connectivity for their businesses, their family's education and social contact. Rural Women New Zealand urges those involved in making the decision on the RBI 2 to do a Rural Impact Assessment on the advantages of using that funding to increase cellphone and broadband coverage to rural New Zealand- economic, social, educationally, healthwise, safety for communities, and the growth of those communities.

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