

## **ACCC – Regional Mobile Infrastructure Inquiry**

### **Submission by: Kalang Progress Association**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

The Kalang Progress Association represents a group of community members, approximately 120.

The Kalang Valley adjacent to the town of Bellingen has about 150 residences and has one road access to the valley ie it has one road in and the same road out. The Kalang Road is a winding road that follows the Kalang River for about 30 kms. It crosses many creeks and also the river many times.

Currently the road is sealed for 15kms and the remainder is dirt road. The valley is very hilly and heavily forested. Many of the residents live on the other side of the river from the road and so are not accessible in times of flood. During times of high wind or rain the Telstra Landline can be severed due to falling trees.

The valley, due to its river and heavily forested hills, is at risk of fire and flood and of course there are, as everywhere, medical emergencies.

The valley does not have any mobile coverage.

Many people are now relying on satellite for their phone calls and messages, if they have the capacity to access wi-fi calling. Many still rely on their landline, which is extremely unreliable in times of emergency. They may not have the resources or know how to access the available satellite communication, being NBN or Starlink. The available landline also relies on a backup battery in the exchange at 1600 Kalang Rd, which is currently in need of replacement. It is understood that Telstra is not prepared to do this at this stage, due to the low number of residences it supplies.

We have a strong and active Rural Fire Service in the valley that could benefit enormously from increased mobile coverage. While the RFS has VHF radio communication between brigade vehicles and back to the Fire Control Centre the firefighters are unable to communicate with family members to update them of any change in the situation.

The Kalang residents were heavily impacted by the bushfires in 2019. They came within 7kms of the valley and residents were on standby to evacuate at any moment. The floods that followed in 2022, while not as frightening, were of major concern due to closure of the road out of the valley as bridges were flooded. Grid power was lost and then within hours Telstra landline battery backup failed. Communications were only possible if the residents had stand alone solar power and satellite communication.

Any improvement to the mobile coverage in this highly vulnerable location would be of enormous benefit.