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Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
mobileroaminginquiry@acc.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern

As a staff member of Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West (RDAFCW), I wish to submit a response to the Mobile Roaming Inquiry. Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a Federally funded initiative to enhance the development of Australia's regions. The Fitzroy and Central West region of RDA covers 12 Local Government areas including Diamantina, Winton, Barcoo, Longreach, Barcardine, Blackall-Tambo, Central Highlands, Woorabinda, Banana, Gladstone, Rockhampton and Livingstone.

Recently I have been involved in a Central West Digital Strategy that looks at mobile and internet connectivity throughout Central Western Queensland. Conversations throughout this consultation covered mobile connectivity in depth, and feedback from this consultation forms the basis for a large part of this submission.

Importance of mobile coverage

The importance of mobile coverage to residents and business owners cannot be understated for practical, economic and safety reasons. Currently across the RDAFCW region there are large patches that remain unconnected. Feedback from residents and business owners clearly identified a tactical investment in infrastructure was required to provide for mobile connectivity, with key transport routes and townships the main priority followed by regional coverage for safety and business as a secondary priority. Access to multiple providers rated much lower as a need, or issue, for consumers across the region.

Key factors when choosing a mobile service

When choosing a service provider across the RDAFCW region consumers generally choose their service provider based on coverage, reliability and then on price. This order changes for consumers based in the regional centres of Rockhampton and Gladstone who do not travel outside of these centres and can choose a provider based on price alone. However, this choice was often weighed up with the personal risk of any travel outside of the centre as often a more limited coverage is provided.

Satisfaction with range of mobile services

Across the region, particularly in Western Queensland people are dissatisfied with the availability of mobile services, not that individuals and businesses seek to source from a variety of services, rather the dissatisfaction lays in the lack of reliable service from any provider across the broader region. Within Western Queensland there is an understanding and acceptance that services in rural areas may be slightly lower than metropolitan areas given the geographic distances and population figures however the push is being made for this to improve to allow businesses to compete nationally and internationally.

How important is it to have access to the latest mobile technology?

Access to reliable and up-to-date technology is essential for running any business, for education, for medical services, and social interactions. This is the case in cities and possibly more important in rural and remote areas. For example, running an agricultural business requires producing the agricultural commodity and therefore time working outside on a property, in that same business the business owner must manage the sale and transport

and of that commodity, which are often completed from a home office. Agricultural producers that do not have access to mobile service face inefficiencies in their business and missed opportunities due to a lack of mobile connectivity. In addition, working in rural and remote locations increases the response time for emergency services, when mobile coverage is not available this additional delay can be deadly. Similar scenarios are faced when looking at education, medical and social opportunities across the region.

Do I think requiring mobile network operators to provide roaming to each other is a good thing?

No. On the surface and possibly in metropolitan locations this looks like an attractive offering, however in rural and remote locations where is the incentive for any provider to invest in infrastructure when the potential client base, small as it is to begin with, can be diluted by competition that do not contribute financially to the infrastructure.

Should regulation of mobile roaming be enforced? It is very likely that providers would no longer invest in regional Queensland if roaming was enforced or a significant contribution to the capital and maintenance costs wasn't made by other providers for access. If mobile infrastructure in regional Queensland (and all regional areas in Australia) is not invested in, it will see regional people and businesses disadvantaged more so than what they already are.

For a State, as large and vast as Queensland, the need for mobile connectivity cannot be overlooked. Residents and businesses within regional and remote Queensland are highlighting their need for mobile connectivity with groups such as the Better Internet for Rural Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR) to allow their businesses and homes to reach the standards of the twenty-first century. Connectivity is the core issue in regional Queensland, not a lack in the number of service providers. Implementing mobile roaming would further delay connectivity in regional Queensland.

Thank you for taking the time to review our submission, if you would like to discuss the matter further we can be contacted on telephone number (07) 4847 6503.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Kanofski', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Graeme Kanofski
Chair
Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West