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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Submission to the ' Domestic mobile roaming service declaration inquiry'

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) Domestic mobile roaming service declaration inquiry. The Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland (RDA) Committee recognises the challenges associated with domestic mobile roaming policy, and as a regional economic development organisation funded by the Australian Government, we are keen to be a participating stakeholder in the determination of such policy.

The Townsville and North West Queensland area is:

- 449,190.9 square kilometres, that is, 5.8% of the Australian continent;
- home to 273,725 residents (QGSO, 2015), that is, 1.1% of Australia's population of 24.2 million (ABS, 2 December, 2016)
- producing Gross Regional Product (GRP) of approx. \$20 billion (based on 2014/15 data), accounting for approx. 1.23% of the national Gross Domestic Product; and
- producing GRP of approx. \$73,066 per head of population compared to an average of \$66,939 per head of population nationally.

Much of this area suffers from a lack of mobile telephone coverage. We engage with all three levels of government and community representatives and know from first-hand experience that communications issues are top of mind for residents.

Each RDA has developed and regularly updates a Regional Roadmap which informs the Australian Government of regional issues and priorities to be addressed and the strategies that can be undertaken to achieve outcomes. RDA works with partners across the region to progress prioritised initiatives and projects. (Refer to <http://www.rdanwq.org.au/regional-roadmap>)

RDA's 2015-2018 Townsville and North West Queensland Regional Roadmap places a high priority on the need for investment into communications infrastructure to ensure long term economic and community sustainability. As a result, we have a strong interest to ensure that decisions regarding policy and legislation on mobile roaming do not disadvantage current or future generations residing in, and travelling to, regional Australia. All decisions should be made with the intent to improve access, reliability and quality of service and pricing. We add the following comments.

1. There must be recognition of the importance of access to mobile telecommunications services as a human right and one of critical importance to community health, safety and well-being.



We have long been concerned about the geographic and socio-economic divide in regard to access to communications infrastructure and services. Social equity is critical.

2. Governments should provide incentives (and not disincentives) to attract investment to improve outcomes for mobile communications coverage in regional Australia, and in particular in remote and very remote areas. Solutions that meet the needs of all Australians must be considered a priority. Any new policy decision must be based on the current status of infrastructure and services, and forecast impacts of the decision to ensure all Australians will benefit, and we reduce the geographic and socio-economic divide.
3. In regard to questions 24 – 27 in the Discussion Paper, geographic coverage is the biggest issue for those who reside in or travel to regional areas. For example, if one lives in a metropolitan city such as Townsville with access to multiple service providers, but travels frequently to western Queensland, Telstra is the only option for access to services while travelling. Telstra can market their service as the solution for those travelling in regional Australia.
4. The current Mobile Blackspot Programme does provide an excellent approach to reducing the gaps in coverage and opens up access to towers by other parties. This seems fair and equitable. Continuing this programme will be beneficial to those who reside in, or travel to, regional Australia. We encourage the Australian Government to continue to invest in this programme. We also recognise the importance of partnerships between all three levels of government and the private sector to develop investment solutions.
5. To develop Northern Australia, communications infrastructure investment is vital. We encourage the Australian Government to seek new opportunities to fast-track investment into new infrastructure and services that enable private sector business investment and job creation.
6. Regional Australia is the heartland of the mining, grazing, agricultural and drive tourism industries that drive exports, jobs and economic prosperity and hence require and deserve the economic infrastructure that capital cities take for granted. As mentioned above, our region is punching above its weight in contributions to the national economy. This significant contribution warrants a better service than what has been provided so far and what is planned to be done.

I wish to thank you for this opportunity to make a submission and once again congratulate you on addressing the needs of I will be happy to provide any further information required or to answer any questions you may have and can be reached on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



Angelo Coco

Chair

