

COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Western Downs Regional Council advocates for the region's multibillion dollar agricultural sector to have access to fast and reliable mobile telecommunications and digital connectivity.



BACKGROUND:

The Western Downs region is located 2.5 hours west of Brisbane and measures 38,000 square kilometre with a population of 34,584.

The size of the region and low-density population support a thriving agriculture industry with ample space for broad acre cropping and intensive agriculture. With 42% of the national feedlot occupancy within a 200km radius of Dalby, the region significantly contributes to the Australian economy.

Despite this, agribusinesses experience issues with reliability, speed and strength of connectivity and are therefore limited or unable to utilise contemporary technology reliant on connectivity.

THE ISSUE:

The Western Downs region has significant gaps in Internet and Mobile coverage. Several notable coverage blackspots exist throughout the region.

The NBN fibre optic backbone runs along the Warrego and Leichhardt Highway, however, apart from Chinchilla, Dalby and Miles town centres, most areas only have fixed wireless or satellite internet, which have reduced reliability and speed.

Many telecommunication providers will only increase coverage when demand justifies investment which is an issue for Local Governments that cover a large geographic area with a (low density) small population base. This particularly impacts widespread agricultural land.

Fast and reliable mobile and internet (connectivity) services are vital to ensure a strong and diverse economy and to assist in ensuring a quality lifestyle for the community.

In addition to this, our mobile phone network is relied upon for communication in emergency situations - particularly in the event of road accidents, farm and industrial accidents, as well as enables our residents to have access to many critical services not available in their areas such as Telehealth.

DESIRED OUTCOME:

Western Downs Regional Council advocates for the region's multibillion dollar agricultural sector to have access to fast and reliable connectivity to conduct their business and implement digital solutions enabling businesses to stay competitive.

BENEFITS:

Strong digital and mobile connectivity are a prerequisite for existing businesses to run day-to-day operations, and to improve productivity to reach markets anywhere in the world.

Economic modelling from the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture project indicates that digital agriculture can increase the gross value of Australian agricultural production by 25%, resulting in an annual increase of \$417 million in total sales.

Several other key industries in the region will benefit from increased connectivity, including our growing tourism industry as a large percentage of operators is located in idyllic locations outside of the main town centres.

COST:

Federal Government Request: Prioritisation of agricultural land in policymaking and investment enabling connectivity.

Approximate Jobs Created: Inevitably, increased productivity in the Agricultural Sector will lead to an increased number of local jobs, in addition to the jobs created to undertake the infrastructure works in the region.