

NB:PB

Date

Vicki Buchbach  
Committee Manager  
Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural & Regional Communities  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Vicki

**Re: Submission on Broadband in Rural & Regional Communities**

Griffith City Council welcomes the chance to provide a submission on behalf of businesses in our region. "Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities" is such an important issue for our communities.

Griffith is a large exporter of products to all parts of the World and there is a growing need for robust and reliable communications to all areas of rural and regional communities, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged just because they operate a business in a regional area of Australia.

Council has been in contact with many local businesses on this issue and we have collated all of their responses in our submission below. We have also provided specific examples to highlight some of these issues. I look forward to being able to provide our Council with a positive response from the findings of the Standing Committee in the near future.

Yours Sincerely

**PETER BROOKS**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON BROADBAND  
IN RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**

**GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION**

Griffith is one of the most vibrant and cosmopolitan cities in Australia with a population of approximately 30,000 and supporting regional catchments in the Western Riverina of nearly 60,000. The city has been widely recognised as the fastest growing inland city in mainland Australia for numerous years, with this growth being sustained by the diversification and value adding of agriculture and industry with in the area.

With unemployment levels at 3.7% and a steady growth that has been built up over many years it is a city that has survived and surged on the diversification of agriculture which is reliant on the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme. Griffith is considered the centre of the Western Riverina with surrounding areas relying on it for many regional services such as health, education, professional services and retail.

Griffith companies export over \$2bn worth of product each year with product going to most corners of the world. There is great diversity in export product from fresh produce, wine, juice, nuts to name a few. The Griffith companies employ a large proportion of the 14,000 strong person labour market that exists in Griffith, (this does not include those that travel from other areas) and are reliant on quality telecommunications services to survive, let alone expand in their various markets. An extremely important point is the many of these businesses that are not always located in the confines of the city limits and many have expanded into large international businesses from farms outside the city area where the raw materials are situated. This creates a challenge in providing quality and reliable telecommunications, especially high-speed broadband.

Griffith City Council has spoken with various businesses in relation to their concerns/issues with broadband and how this affects their business, as well as reviewing our own requirements in regards to broadband in our Local Government Area (LGA). This submission will cover three main areas:

- 1. ISSUES RAISED**
  
- 2. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**
  
- 3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 1. ISSUES RAISED

Griffith City Council has been very proactive in its endeavours to ensure that our community is not disadvantaged when it comes to telecommunications and especially broadband access, by keeping in constant contact with Telstra Countrywide on Griffith's future development. These discussions have not always proven fruitful, with areas of the city only just getting access to wireless broadband and mobile phone services that the rest of the city has had access to for many years.

As part of this submission many different businesses were interviewed so that a general consensus of issues could be brought forward rather than focussing on individual issues that may have been encountered.

The major issues that have been highlighted are as follows:

- Most businesses were concerned with the inability to be able to access true high-speed broadband access that would allow their businesses to compete in the international marketplace. To be able to access these high speeds would enable businesses to be able to download large data files at a greater rate, which inevitably saves time and money. It is believed that these speeds are available in regional areas but have not been authorised or "turned on" by the individual carriers.
- The cost of broadband access relative to the capital cities was raised as a concern and with very few carriers concentrating on the regional and rural areas then competition does not dictate lower prices.
- With many of Griffith's businesses being established on farms outside of the city limits there is a real concern that these businesses are being unfairly disadvantaged. With current high-speed broadband systems having a limited distance restriction on which they can function some of these businesses are required to come into town to download files which can take up to 20 minutes on dial-up to complete.
- The coverage and reliability of the new Next G network compared to the CDMA network is causing much angst for regional and rural customers as this service has become a major communication link for them. If the Next G network fails to emulate the current CDMA network then regional and rural customers will not only have their businesses disadvantaged but also the everyday lives.
- Telstra's aging and failing infrastructure is causing unnecessary disruptions to services and has been a major issue inhibiting the businesses and customers being able to get the high speed broadband. Regional and rural areas have mostly copper cables and an older style joint, which affect the quality of line to premises and restricts the speed that broadband, will work.

- There seems to be no consistency of planning, with telecommunications being an after thought in most cases and with competition causing uncertainty as to who owns the infrastructure.

## **2. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

The social and economic impacts of poor or inadequate broadband services are far greater than just not being able to access your favourite website or not receiving e-mails, it involves being in touch socially and in business.

With the region experiencing a skilled and semi-skilled labour shortage the endeavours by businesses to attract these workers is not enhanced if they are not able to provide the same level of broadband access as available in the cities. This applies at work and at home, as half of the battle in attracting quality workers to regional areas is providing an appropriate lifestyle for their families. Most of these families have become accustomed to a certain standard of broadband delivery in the capital cities and they expect the same when they move to regional areas.

This extends to the workplace when attracting both workers and businesses as there has been instances where businesses have relocated some parts of their business to the capital cities because they require higher speed broadband access. Inadequate broadband services have the potential to further impact on local businesses causing them to consider relocating more of their operations to the capital cities in order to stay competitive with other companies, both nationally and internationally.

Griffith City Council has been proactive in creating educational opportunities for local students with the recent signing of a MoU with Charles Sturt University and Riverina Institute TAFE to provide university courses locally but the standard of broadband has already had an impact on this. The program is designed to provide university courses to local students, who are also required to study on-line but some students from areas outside of the city limits have to come into town to access their course material because of inadequate broadband access at their homes. There have actually been a couple of students who have ceased or deferred their studies because of the inconvenience. As a community we can not afford for our educational services to be jeopardised because of the failings of infrastructure that is crucial to the viability of the service.

## **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **The NSW Government encourage the Commonwealth Government to invest long term funds into upgrading current telecommunication infrastructure in regional and rural areas.**
- **Commonwealth & State programs be targeted towards Local Government who will be able to better identify local issues**
- **Incentives should be offered to developers to install a higher standard of broadband infrastructure in new housing developments to better enable access for new residents.**