



8th November 2023

The Director
Telecommunications Deployment Policy Section
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601
Via: new.developments@infrastructure.gov.au

Re: Consultation on amendments to the TIND Policy

This submission by Regional Development Australia Southern Inland (RDASI) is to provide feedback on the possible amendments to the Telecommunications in New Developments (TIND) Policy to improve mobile connectivity in new developments, and other measures to improve fixed voice and broadband services.

RDASI is represented by local leaders and staff who are passionate about the communities in the Southern Inland region of New South Wales (NSW). Part of a national network of 52 Regional Development Australia (RDA) Boards across Australia, RDASI's role is to support the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Southern Inland region of NSW, including Wingecarribee, Goulburn Mulwaree, Upper Lachlan, Hilltops, Yass Valley, Queanbeyan-Palerang, and Snowy Monaro. RDASI works with all levels of government, business, and community groups to promote economic and social development in the region by facilitating regional projects, collaboration, communication, and advocacy.

As part of this submission, we present the results of a regionally targeted survey designed to gather feedback from residents on issues and impacts of mobile connectivity in new developments. We also address the questions under 'Next steps – Have your say', presented in the '[Consultation Paper - Possible amendments to the Telecommunications in New Developments Policy – Mobile Connectivity and Other Measures](#)' document, provided on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts website.

We thank the Department for the opportunity to provide feedback as part of this consultation process.

Mobile connectivity in new developments | RDASI region

To inform our submission, RDASI distributed a survey relating to mobile connectivity in new development to community members from across the RDASI region. The survey incorporated a series of questions which included multiple choice answers, with the option for respondents to contribute their own free text comments. People over 18 years of age who have experienced issues with mobile phone coverage in new houses and / or developments across the RDASI region were invited to participate via direct email invitation and a LinkedIn post.

Survey respondents were assured that the feedback provided would be de-identified as part of this submission. As such, every attempt has been made to remove identifying information without altering the meaning of the responses.

Demographics

Eighteen people from across the region completed the survey.

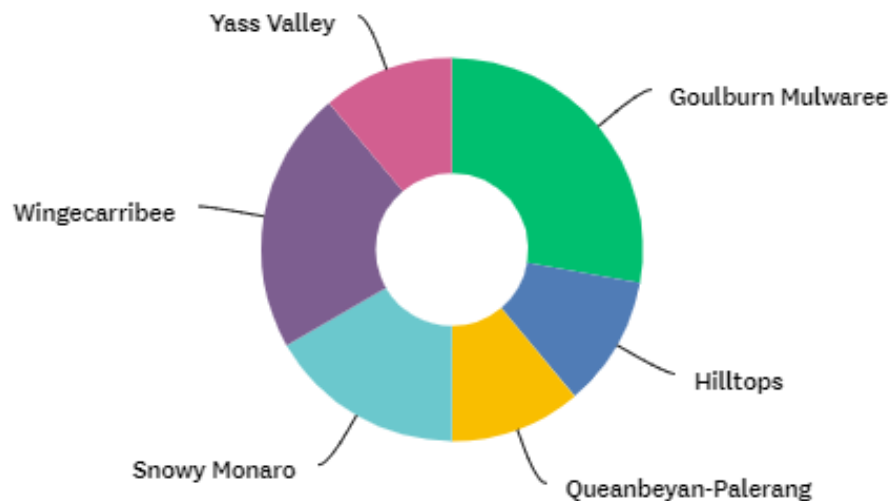
Age

The survey asked respondents to indicate their age group, with the following results:

- 65 year or older – 22.22%
- 55-64 years – 16.67%
- 45 – 54 years – 22.22%
- 35-44 years – 27.78%
- 25 – 34 years – 11.11%
- 18 – 25 years – 0%

RDASI Local Government Area

The following chart presents the Local Government Area within the RDASI network in which the respondent resides.



Issues and impacts of limited mobile coverage in new developments

A series of questions relating to mobile connectivity in new developments was asked as part of the survey to better understand the issues and impacts experienced across the region. Below is a summary of the questions and responses gathered.

Q: What issues have you experienced with mobile phone coverage?

Responses:

- No coverage anywhere in the new house or in the yard – 5.88%
- Coverage only in certain areas of the house – 17.65%
- Coverage only in certain areas of the yard – 0%
- Coverage only in certain areas of the house and yard – 41.18%
- Other – 35.29%

Some issues / comments provided in a free text form by this group include:

- No coverage at times.
- Not much phone reception in the house.

Q: Have you encountered any risks as a result of inadequate mobile coverage at your house?

Responses:

- No – 47.06%
- Yes. Please tell us what happened – 52.94%

Some risks / comments provided in a free text form include:

- Need for emergency services.
- Missed out an interview for promotion in health sector.
- Car accidents on the main Highway Monaro Highway 200 metres from our house and unable to contact emergency services and get help.
- Safety.
- Unable to contact important people.
- Property has no landline so dependent on mobile and data via dish.
- My wife is type 1 diabetic and was going "hypo" and she couldn't call me.
- Can't answer phone calls.
- My husband was trying to call me to let me know our daughter was not well, but he was not able to get in touch with me as I was down at the other end of the house. He had to run down to wake me up so I could come up, assess the situation, and then call an ambulance from the front of the house where there is reception.

Q: Have you encountered any other impacts as a result of inadequate mobile coverage at your house?

Responses:

- No – 11.76%
- Yes. (please specify) – 88.24%:

Some impacts / comments provided in a free text form include:

- Intermittent internet on my mobile.

- I operate my business from home and the service is poor and calls drop out with regularity.
- Drop out.
- Being a solo mother, I rely on my phone to get support if required.
- Unable to receive calls relating to work when I'm on call.
- Technology i.e., GPS - on our new tractor for cropping operations unable to connect to be operational. Unable to work from home as terrible connectivity.
- Difficult to check on family and friends, and hard to call anyone for help.
- The loss of business and downtime of dealing with clients.
- Hard to connect to the internet.
- Impacts on managing property e.g., security and internet.
- When we have power outages (and we get many here) we can't receive calls on landline cordless phones, so we need to start generators and there is no mobile as backup.
- Very hard to run a business when the phone doesn't work, loss of income.
- Inability to work from home effectively.
- Can't answer the calls due to poor reception.
- Issues with completing my work as I work from home.

'Next steps – Have your say' – Consultation Paper Questions

1. *Should the possible changes be adopted in full, in part, or not at all? Please provide any reasons for your recommendation if you choose in part or not at all.*

Yes, adopted in full.

2. *Are there other criteria that could be considered as well?*

Regulation under the Tel Act

Regulation should be considered to provide clear guidelines, ensure compliance, and protect the interests of residents and communities in new developments.

3. *Do you believe these proposed amendments will achieve the aim of encouraging mobile telecommunication infrastructure being available in new developments when residents initially move in? If not, what suggestions or alternative approaches do you think would achieve the outcome more effectively?*

While the proposed amendments may **encourage** mobile telecommunication infrastructure to be developed in new developments, as stated above, **regulation under the Tel Act is required** to provide clear guidelines, ensure compliance, and protect the interests of residents and communities in new developments.

In addition to this, Mobile Service (and Internet Service) should be declared an essential service. This proposition is grounded in the fundamental importance of mobile communications, especially in regional areas, where it plays a pivotal role in enabling access to critical government services, ensuring public health, education, and welfare services are accessible to all Australians.

The [Essential Services Act 1988](#) clearly delineates services that are deemed essential for the well-being and functioning of a community and are crucial for maintaining a safe, healthy, and functional society.

Notably, the definition of an Essential Service in section 4 of the Act includes sub sections:

- (c) the provision of fire-fighting services,
- (d) the provision of public health services (including hospital or medical services),
- (e) the provision of ambulance services,
- (i) the conduct of a welfare institution,
- (l) a service comprising the supply of goods or **services necessary for providing any service referred to in paragraphs (a)–(k)**.

A reliable mobile service is necessary **for providing services referred to in paragraphs (a)–(k)**, especially in remote and regional areas where access to physical services can be limited. In these areas, mobile connections become a lifeline for residents, providing them with the means to access critical government services including telehealth consultations and welfare services such as crisis intervention, remote support programs and case management, which are all integral to the well-being of individuals and communities.

[Infrastructure Australia](#), the nation's independent infrastructure advisor, was established in 2008 to advise governments, industry and the community on the investments and reforms needed to deliver better infrastructure for all Australians. The Infrastructure Australia [website](#) states, 'The 2019 Australian Infrastructure Audit acknowledges that mobile services in regional, rural and remote areas can be costly and poor quality, and that coverage gaps affect community safety, liveability and productivity'.

In addition to this, this independent government advisory body outlines that in times of crisis, such as extreme weather events, bushfires, flooding, or other serious incidents, the need for a reliable mobile service is paramount. Acknowledging that reliable mobile coverage facilitates immediate communication, allowing individuals to seek assistance, access emergency services, and receive timely information and that this can significantly reduce response times and, ultimately, save lives and property.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of mobile connectivity in ensuring continuity of services, particularly in regional areas. With the implementation of telehealth services, online education, and remote work arrangements, mobile connectivity has become a linchpin in maintaining social and economic functioning, even in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Declaring mobile service as an essential service will assist in guiding future policy development and industry regulation and acknowledge the critical role that mobile communications play in safeguarding the health, education, and welfare of Australians, especially in regional areas where physical access to services may be limited, or non-existent. Regulation will ensure industry compliance, enhance the well-being of regional communities, and strengthen the resilience of the nation.

Regional Development Australia Southern Inland is extremely invested in advocating for the declaration of mobile service as an essential service under the Essential Services Act 1988 and implore the Mobile Telecommunications Working Group (Working Group) to work towards the same goal.

4. Do you have any concerns regarding compliance with the proposed changes to the TIND Policy that you would like to raise?

Yes. It's simply not enough to propose amendments designed 'to set expectations regarding mobile connectivity'.

If the proposed changes to the TIND (Telecommunications in New Developments) Policy are not regulated, compliance cannot be enforced, which may result in the following challenges:

- Inconsistent Implementation - inconsistency in how developers interpret and implement the proposed changes. This could lead to varying levels of mobile connectivity provision across different developments.
- Lack of Accountability - Developers may not feel compelled to adhere to the proposed expectations without legal requirements in place. This could lead to a lack of accountability in ensuring mobile connectivity is adequately considered and provided.
- Delayed Action - Developers may not prioritise mobile connectivity planning if it is not mandated by regulation. This could lead to delays in addressing connectivity needs, potentially leaving residents without adequate services.
- Incomplete Coverage- Developers may choose not to invest in comprehensive mobile coverage, potentially leaving certain areas within a development with inadequate or no connectivity.
- Negotiation Challenges - The expectation for developers to reach 'fair terms' in land access agreements may be open to interpretation without regulatory guidance. This could lead to disputes and challenges in negotiating agreements.
- Insufficient Infrastructure Planning - Developers may not allocate appropriate space or sites for mobile infrastructure deployment without regulatory guidance. This could result in retrofitting or suboptimal placement of infrastructure.
- Public Safety Concerns - Inadequate mobile coverage, especially in emergency situations, could pose risks to public safety. Without regulation, there may be no mechanism to ensure sufficient coverage for such scenarios.
- Lack of Oversight - Without regulatory oversight, there may be no formal mechanism to monitor compliance with the proposed changes, potentially allowing non-compliance to go unchecked.
- Inequitable Access - Without regulation, there may be a risk that certain demographic groups or areas within a development may not receive equitable access to mobile connectivity, potentially exacerbating digital divides.
- Unclear Responsibilities - The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders (governments, developers, carriers, etc.) in improving mobile coverage may not be clearly defined without regulatory guidance, potentially leading to confusion and inefficiencies.

5. *Is the proposed timeframe for engagement with a possible carrier, that is, at least twelve months before the first units or homes in the development are due to be occupied, reasonable in your view? If not, please suggest an alternative timeframe and please provide any reasons for your recommendation.*

Organisations responsible for mobile telecommunication infrastructure, such as major Telcos and / or independent carriers, should be consulted at the **earliest stages** of the design and planning process, well before the proposed 12-month pre-move in date, to ensure adequate mobile phone infrastructure is installed as part of a new housing development.

Early engagement would allow for effective coordination, planning and development to meet the needs and requirements of government bodies, developers, carriers, and future residents. The importance of early engagement with the development process is outlined below:

- **Urban Design or Masterplan Phase:** Consulting with a carrier during this stage in the development process where the overall layout, infrastructure placement, and zoning of the area are determined allows for the integration of appropriate mobile infrastructure into the overall design.
- **Pre-Development Planning:** Developers should engage with carriers to discuss the specific requirements for mobile infrastructure pre-planning, to ensure potential site locations for towers or other equipment are identified before construction begins.
- **Site Selection:** Identifying suitable sites or spaces for mobile infrastructure is a crucial step. Carriers can provide valuable input on the best locations for maximum coverage and effectiveness.
- **Approval Process:** Engaging carriers early can help streamline the approval process, as it allows for the consideration of mobile infrastructure requirements alongside other utilities and services.
- **Infrastructure Design:** Once the site is selected, the design of the infrastructure can be tailored to fit seamlessly into the overall development plan, ensuring that it complements other aspects of the project.
- **Coordination with Other Utilities:** Early engagement with carriers allows for better coordination with other utility providers, such as electricity and water, to ensure that all necessary infrastructure is planned and deployed efficiently.
- **Timeline Considerations:** Planning for mobile infrastructure can be a complex process that may take considerable time. By involving carriers early, there is a better chance of aligning the deployment of mobile infrastructure with the broader construction schedule.

By involving carriers at these early stages, developers can ensure that access to a reliable mobile service is integrated smoothly into the new housing development, minimising potential issues, and providing residents with reliable access to mobile services from the outset.



In Summary

RDA Southern Inland works across a region encompassing 44,639 square kilometres, including seven local government areas in the south-east of NSW, home to over 210,000 Australians. Our mission is to support the development of this part of regional Australia, acting as a conduit between residents, business owners and government agencies, providing a connection point for growth, prosperity, and liveability. We drive jobs, investment, and innovation through collaboration, communication, advocacy, and the facilitation of regional projects. We strive to disseminate information and resources to our community members and provide unbiased support.

The survey conducted by Regional Development Australia Southern Inland highlighted that 52.94% of respondents encountered risks, including emergencies, and missed opportunities, and 88.24% reported difficulties in business operations, managing property, and staying connected with family and friends. The feedback demonstrates the importance of improving mobile connectivity in new developments, emphasising the potential risks and challenges faced by RDASI residents due to inadequate coverage.

Regional Development Australia Southern Inland wholeheartedly supports the proposed changes to the TIND Policy and agree that they should be adopted in full. While the proposed amendments may encourage mobile telecommunication infrastructure to be developed in new developments, regulation would provide clear guidelines, ensure compliance, and protect the interests of residents and communities in new developments.

In addition to this, organisations responsible for mobile telecommunication infrastructure should be consulted at the earliest stages of the design and planning process, well before the estimated 12-month pre-move in date, to allow for effective coordination, planning and development, that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

As stated, Regional Development Australia Southern Inland is extremely invested in advocating for the declaration of mobile service as an essential service under the Essential Services Act 1988. We implore the Government to act in the best interests of everyday Australian's, to enhance the well-being of regional communities and strengthen the resilience of the nation by declaring mobile service an essential service.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback via this regionally targeted submission, on the proposed amendments to the Telecommunications in New Developments Policy.

Kind regards,

Carisa Wells
CEO and Director of Regional Development