

## **Submission for consideration of Backhaul Blackspot Initiative**

I am a resident of Broken Hill in the State of New South Wales, located approximately 1600kms west of Sydney and approximately 500kms east of Adelaide.

Broken Hill is a town of around 25,000 people with the main employment coming from the mining industry. The second largest employer in Broken Hill would be from State Government Services such as Schools, Hospitals, Police, Corrective Services, Attorney General's Department and the National Parks and Wildlife but to name a few.

The lack of investment in Broken Hill has, in my opinion, held this town from further development and an inability to move forward into the future. With the rapid integration of technology into consumer markets and businesses Broken Hill, its residents and businesses have been left behind and in a lot of cases been left uncompetitive and outdated.

One of the main causes as I see it is the lack of infrastructure being installed, with a complete lack of competition. Currently, in terms of telephony and Internet services, the only backhaul provider in Broken Hill is that of Telstra. There is no competition in the Broken Hill market which means that there is no alternative choices open to residents and businesses alike to seize a better deal.

Broken Hill is pretty much divided into two halves, the northern half located to the north of the old MMM mining site and the southern side located south of said mining site. In terms of telephony services, all residents in Broken Hill's established areas are able to access basic telephone services such as voice and dial-up internet, but not all residents are able to achieve ADSL broadband.

There is only the one telephone exchange situated in Broken Hill which is located behind the Australia Post Office on the corner of Argent & Chloride Streets. The placement of the exchange means that not all residents and businesses of Broken Hill can obtain ADSL broadband due to the limitations of the technology and how far the signal can travel on the copper network before signal degradation is too high.

This results in many residents and businesses having to use dial-up or very expensive Wireless Broadband technology. Dial-up in terms of technology is like comparing a Horse drawn cart to that of a Ferrari Enzo, it is not even in the same league as that of ADSL or more importantly Fibre-optic broadband. Wireless broadband on the other hand is quite expensive, nowhere near as reliable as ADSL/Fibre-optic and the data allowances are quite meagre compared to ADSL plans.

Broken Hill residents and businesses are at a significant disadvantage compared to that of our city cousins. There is no competition in Broken Hill unlike that of major regional or city locations where there are often a number of different backhaul providers available to choose from. When residents and businesses of Broken Hill approach our only provider Telstra in order to obtain certain services, such as ADSL broadband, they are often treated with disdain and a lack of respect for our situation. It is almost as though Telstra are fully aware of the situation in Broken Hill and are not about to change their ways or policies in order to treat rural and regional customers in a fair and respectful manner.

On a personal level I know of three friends who have been denied ADSL broadband by Telstra due to one reason or another. One of the main reasons why these people have been denied ADSL broadband is not simply technological, rather the lack of competition, for should there be a more competitive market in Broken Hill I am sure that these people would certainly be facing a whole different situation.

However, in each of their cases there is always some sort of technical reason given by Telstra as to why they cannot receive ADSL broadband. Though professionals in the

industry living in Broken Hill and who have previously worked and still contract for Telstra seem to have a different opinion. On one occasion the technician actually called Telstra from the client's address in order to advocate the client's ability to receive ADSL broadband, though neither the operator nor their supervisor on the end of the phone would hear of it. In fact the standard response given by Telstra staff over and over was that their system showed the specified address as being unable to receive ADSL broadband, despite the technician advising the staff of whom he was, what his qualifications were and the fact that Telstra had sent him out to inspect the line.

This lack of competition, the outdated computer records of and uncooperative staff working for Telstra has inconvenienced many residents and businesses and the financial impact of this situation has never been considered, nor could it ever be effectively calculated.

It is also important to note that the main fibre-optic cable that crosses Australia from Sydney to Perth runs straight through (on the outskirts of) Broken Hill, therefore a FTTH rollout would certainly be feasible. Also considering that all of the main infrastructures in Broken Hill are aboveground such as electricity and current telephony cabling, there would be no need to pay any third party to access their underground conduit etc, rather the fibre-optic cabling could be run from the power poles to the premises.

That said, it is my intention to promote Broken Hill as one of the first towns in Australia to receive a backhaul upgrade in order to increase local services, introduce competition, increase the standard of living, promote equality of products and services to that of the capital cities and encourage the local community and State Government to invest more capital within the local community that contributes so much to the state's financial income.

After reading several news articles from such websites as [www.itnews.com.au](http://www.itnews.com.au), [www.cnet.com.au](http://www.cnet.com.au), [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au), [www.australianit.com.au](http://www.australianit.com.au) and the Minister for Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy's own website [www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/2009/029](http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/029) it is understood that even the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has indicated that Broken Hill should be an initial target for a backhaul upgrade in order to achieve competition in the area.

In summary, Broken Hill is a town of about 25,000 residents situated on the New South Wales and South Australian boarder. Its main sources of employment are from the mining industry and that of State Government Departments. In terms of telephony and internet related services it has only one backhaul provider, Telstra. Due to a lack of infrastructure investment and a failure to maintain communication equipment, there is a vast area of the local population unable to receive basic ADSL broadband services. Other broadband technologies available are far too expensive, unreliable and do not offer value for money, especially when compared to residents situated in capital cities.

Those are my submissions, in which I hope that you will consider Broken Hill, situated in the State of New South Wales, to be a matter of priority to receive funding towards a backhaul upgrade, specifically the implementation of an FTTH broadband network.

Yours sincerely,

Mathew Singleton