



Growing the best

Telecommunication Issues in Rural NSW

2011 Survey

“Telecommunications are as essential to our business as any other in metropolitan areas...”

- NSW Farmers, August 2011

587 Members of NSW Farmers completed a telecommunications survey in September 2011.

The results provide an important snap-shot of the telecommunication issues currently facing the Australian agricultural sector.

“An internet service equal to that provided to the city should be made available to country people at a similar price, download limit & speed.”

Farmers in NSW...

...have a home internet connection used for activities such as banking and email, although it's **not fast enough for videos**.

...are **interested in learning about cutting edge technology** through localised training and demonstrations.

...have a mobile plan with Telstra used for calls, internet and email, although **on-farm coverage is inadequate**.

...consider **Government investment in expanding mobile phone coverage** as their number one priority.

...still want and **need a home phone**.

...are **experienced with service outages and equipment failures**, although trying to get them fixed can be more painful than the faults themselves.



Internet

93% of respondents stated that they had a **home internet connection**, although those without internet connections were not as easily surveyed. NSW Farmers has email addresses for roughly 70% of our Members.

In stark contrast to metropolitan markets, **Telstra dominates the internet market in rural NSW**. Despite a number of options being available, many respondents were devoid of choice. Respondents cited the following reasons for their choice of internet provider:

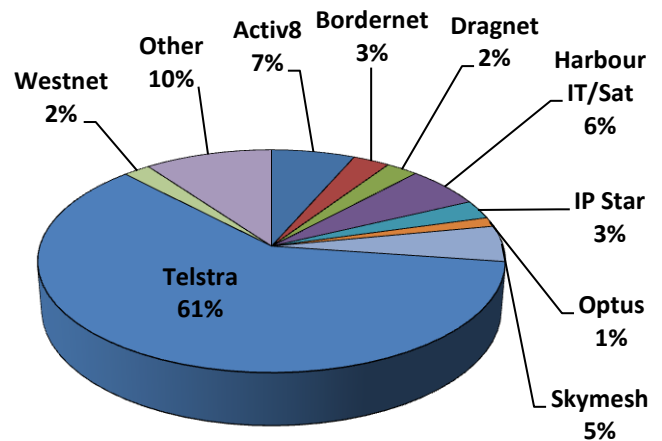
No Choice	24 %
Price	21%
Speed	21%
Convenience	20%
Other	14%

Rural NSW is accessing internet in a different way to those in Sydney, impacting the type of uses that are possible.

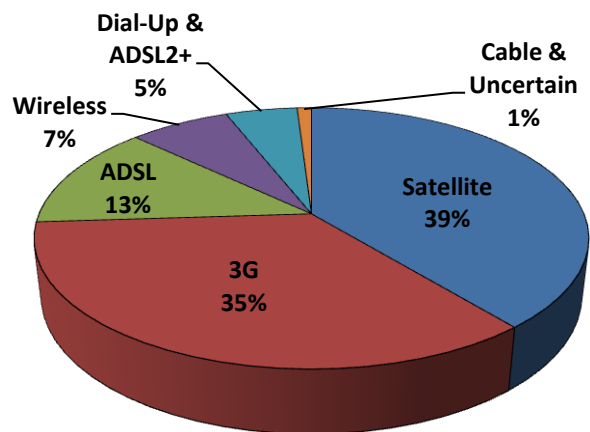
Popular internet types were dominated by the shared spectrum services satellite and 3G, with dial-up use on the decline.

Previous studies have shown a large difference in **speeds** for internet use. While Survey data was inconclusive due to respondent uncertainty, 512/126 megabits per second was the most popular response. However comments were dominated by a single word: **SLOW**.

Home Internet Service Provider



Internet Type

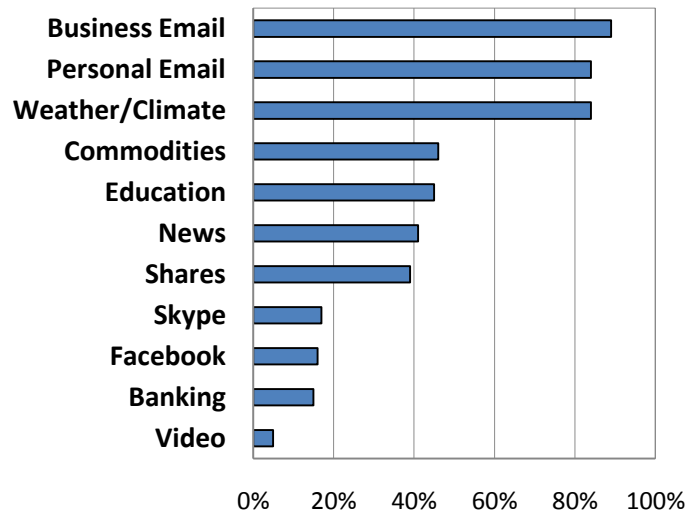


“Using the internet is the most painful, boring, time wasting exercise imaginable. I can make and drink a coffee between start-up and connection - but the internet has become essential.”

Internet

Simpler, 'internet 1.0' type activities dominated usage. Low video use represents a huge opportunity once the NBN is rolled out.

Popular Internet Uses



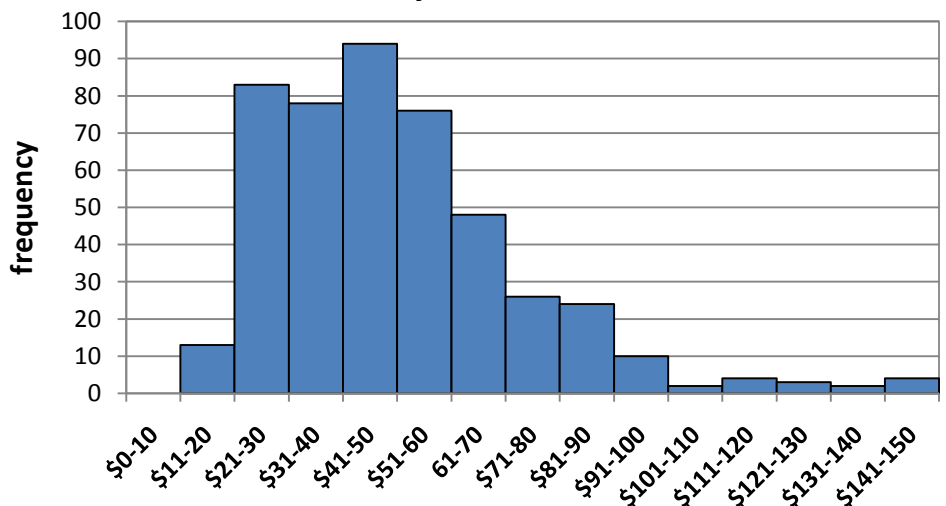
Recommendation

A quality of service guarantee to ensure customers of the wireless and satellite NBN services have access to all the services offered to optic fibre customers.

Traditionally prices paid outside of cities have been high and varied.

Responses on price paid were varied, with half between the \$37 and \$67 dollar range, and an **average of \$54.**

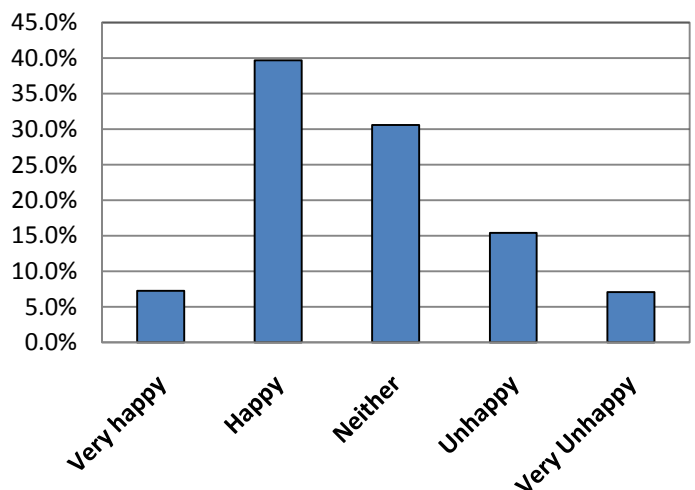
Monthly Internet Bill



Given the service and costs, it was not surprising that **most respondents were not satisfied with their internet plans.**

However, a reasonable number of respondents were happy with their plan, suggesting that farmers may be complacent in their expectations of their internet plan. This history of poor service could potentially impact the demand for services under the NBN.

Internet Plan Satisfaction



Phones

With the focus on the telecommunications world seemingly on the NBN, expansion of mobile phone coverage and the increase in importance of Smartphone technology has seemingly been forgotten in rural telecommunications policy.

Home phones have maintained prominence in rural Australia due to poor mobile coverage and more settled residents.

95% of respondents considered their home phones as essential or important.

Recommendation

That both mobile and fixed line telephones are considered an 'essential standard phone service'.

"The home phone is essential, when it's down our family has no way to get in contact with us."

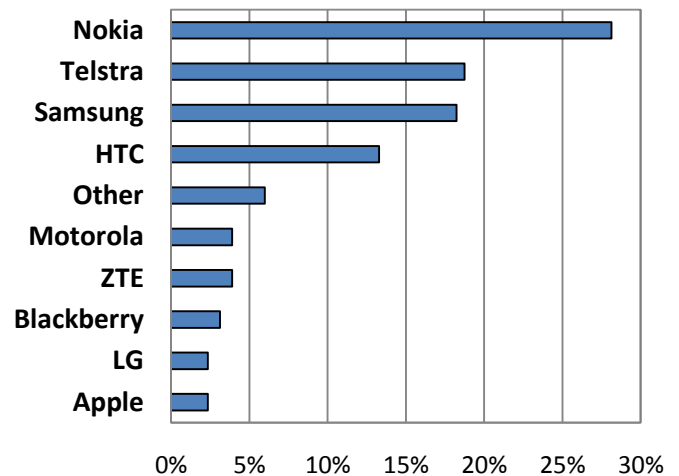
As part of a process to improve mobile coverage in rural areas, Telstra created the Blue tick program to identify phones with better coverage. Surprisingly of the top 6 brands used by respondents only 3 had a blue tick option.

If the Government invested in mobile phone footprint expansion, those outside cities can **focus on phone performance rather than phone reception**, as is already the case in cities.

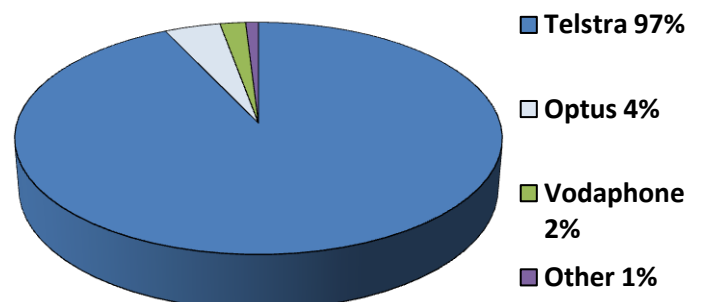
Telstra dominates the **rural mobile phone provider market**. Suggesting that there is very limited competition available for those living in rural NSW.

In the absence of increased competition in the future, significant monitoring and regulation of this monopoly market must continue to ensure equality of service and cost.

Mobile Phone Brand



Mobile Phone Service Provider



Phones

Given the essential nature of mobile phones in today's business world, and in emergency communications, rural Australians are at a severe disadvantage due to poor **mobile phone coverage**. Respondents indicated that the adequacy of on-farm mobile coverage was very poor.

Recommendation

Government investments to expand the current mobile footprint.

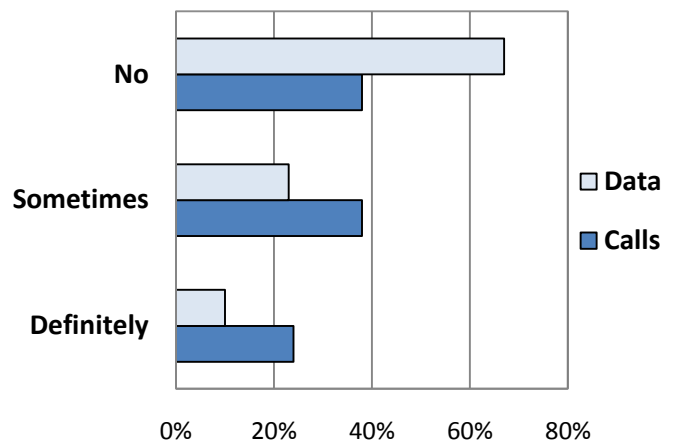
"The assumption is that mobile coverage is available 24/7 to all now, and businesses now expect rapid responses which are hard to give if you don't get service."

Given the **Smartphone revolution** currently underway, mobile call and data coverage has newfound importance.

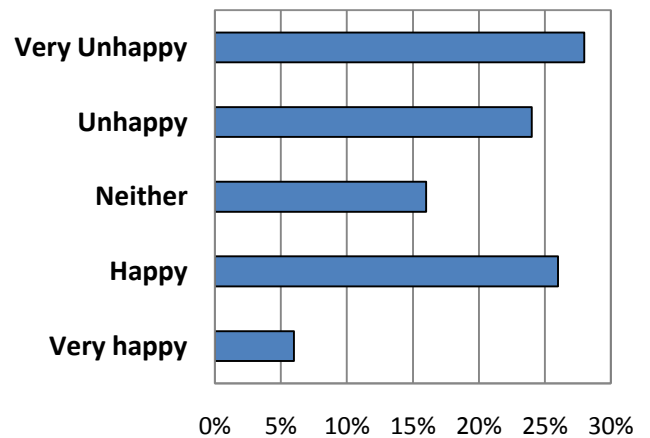
45% of respondents who had mobile phone users reported that they had used **internet or email on their mobile phone**.

Given that less than 10% had definite on-farm data coverage, the primary constraint in rural NSW is the ability to get a signal.

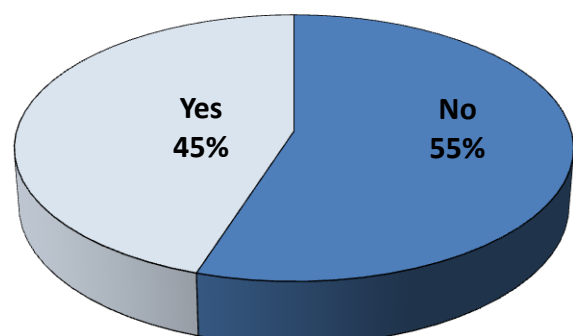
On-Farm Coverage Adequacy



Happiness with Mobile Coverage



Use of Internet/Email on Phone



Digital Economy

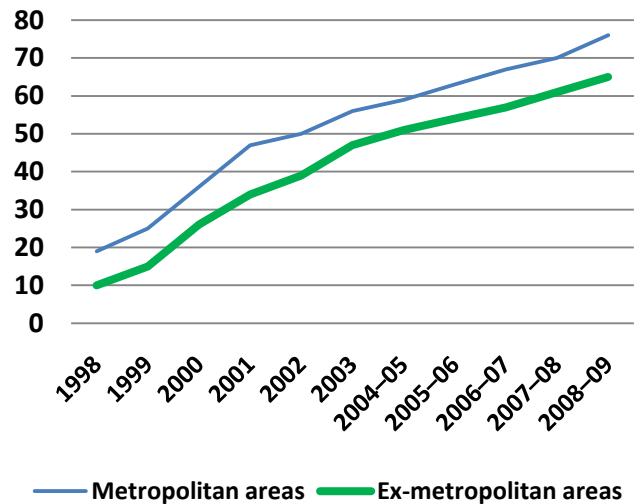
ABS data shows that the geographic digital divide has continued but that the adoption rate for internet has decreased despite improvements to technology. Non-metropolitan areas now take twice as long to reach the equivalent metropolitan levels of adoption. Digital economy initiatives must target all technologies including mobiles.

The roll-out of the NBN provides Australia with the opportunity to invest in programs to ensure a strong take-up and use of new technology.

Recommendation

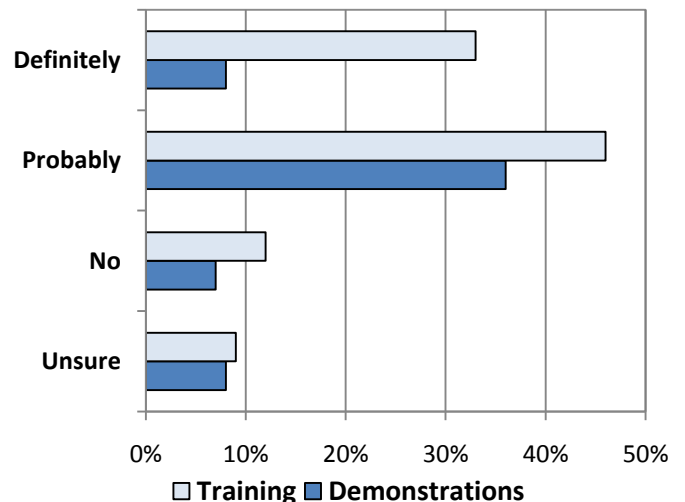
That the Federal Government include a 'Digital Farms' element of the broader Digital Economy Strategy.

Geographic Digital Divide - % of Households with Internet



Whilst respondents had a preference for demonstrations of technology over training, **the support for local learning initiatives was overwhelming.**

Interest in Attending New Technology



“The provision of rural-specific complaints handling services and IT information centres, would benefit citizens and inform policy positions as the NBN is rolled out.”

“I believe that in order for rural businesses (not just farmers!) to prosper, fast, efficient and reliable communications are essential. The internet is one of the most important tools in today’s society. Social and economic capacity and potential in rural areas is, at present, largely restricted by current communications systems and infrastructure.”

Customer Service

Many customer service issues affecting rural residents such as slow response times are experienced Australia-wide. However, the lack of understanding of rural telecommunications needs, and the inability of many to take their business elsewhere compounds these problems.

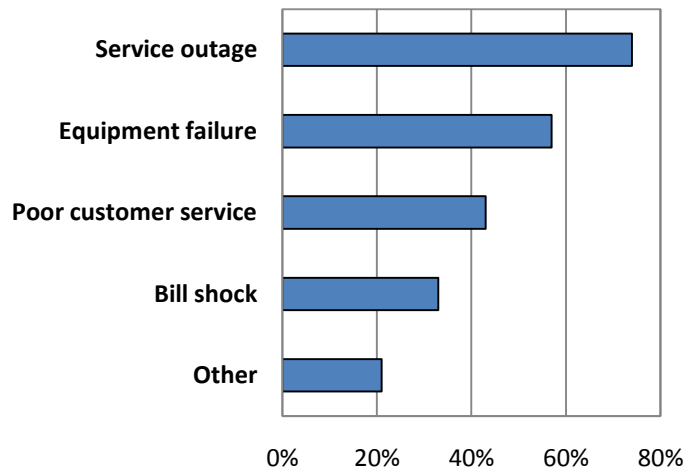
“My mobile phone issue was addressed eventually. We were told ‘it was our fault for living remotely’ by quite a few call centres.”

“Staff have absolutely no idea about rural customers and offer insulting suggestions.. after I explained that the only place in the house where we get reception was over the kitchen sink..it was suggested I move my office there!”

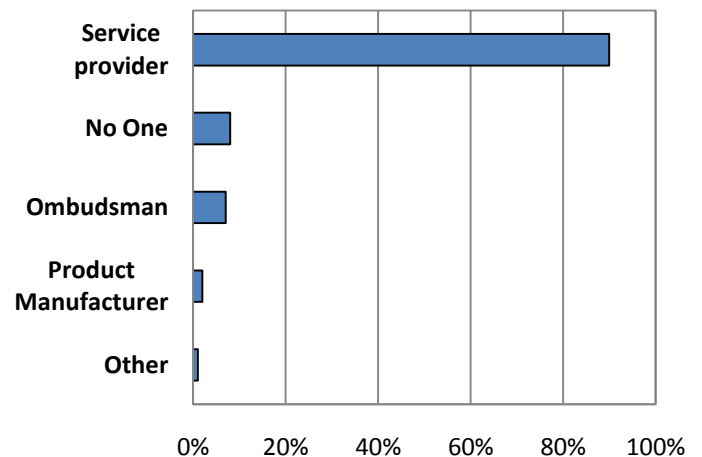
Recommendation

That the Federal Government provides independent rural telecommunications advice.

Personal Experience of Issues



Issues Were Reported To



All telecommunications customers dream of having any issues addressed quickly. Feedback suggest that **issues were addressed around half the time**, although often after a frustrating and long process. 14% provided a simple yes when asked if their issues were addressed adequately, compared to 25% who stated no.

NSW Farmers calls for **quality, affordable** and **equitable** telecommunications services for all Australians, regardless of location.



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