



Position Paper: **Committing to connectivity as a core utility**

Problem

Our vision is that by 2033, all individuals and businesses in New Zealand will have unrestricted access to the technology and services they need to thrive. This is reflective of the fact that the last few years have shown that high-quality connectivity has real value and is an essential need in today's world. If there was any lingering doubt, the significant weather events of early 2023 made it clear that we need to invest in resilient connectivity for our rural communities.

While the vast majority of urban NZ have been able to carry on without missing a beat, regional and rural NZ users have had mixed experiences at best or had to deal with being disconnected for significant periods. As we head into a period of infrastructure rebuild in large parts of the motu, we need to ensure that the lessons in resiliency we have learned this year are not forgotten. It is not simply a case of rebuilding what was there before, we must build back better.



Position

When the current rural broadband initiatives (RBI2, MBSF, and Marae Connectivity Programme) are complete, New Zealand will have improved broadband coverage to an estimated over 99 per cent of the population. While we should give credit where credit is due, there is still work to be done and challenges to be addressed to ensure the remaining 100,000 people can be connected and that all rural users can access the same quality, high-speed broadband as their urban counterparts.

Solutions to rural connectivity challenges are not only about providing better coverage and capacity but about understanding and delivering on the broader connectivity needs of rural and remote New Zealanders. We still need to look at connectivity in the digital world more holistically in terms of affordability, use, skills, digital literacy, and value. Additionally, there remains a strong need to ensure adequate support and information is available to rural New Zealanders, within their communities, so they can be informed consumers.

However this is not just about rural and remote – after the significant weather events of early 2023, we also recognise the need for infrastructure and solutions to provide resilient connectivity that can withstand the impacts of future weather events and keep up with demand due to the migration from urban to regional and rural areas. We know that these events will occur and areas of the motu will be cut off from telecommunications services. We need to see faster resupply times and more resilient solutions for sites.

Connectivity is no longer a 'nice to have', it is an essential component of being able to fully participate in a digital world and resilient connectivity will only be possible if connectivity is seen as a lifeline and prioritised, and we employ a more "whole of New Zealand approach". This will require more strategic alignment, collaboration, and communication between the Government, RSPs, WISPs, infrastructure providers, Marae, and community groups.

Recommendations

- Government recognising and prioritising connectivity is a key utility like electricity or water.
- Government needs to continue to invest to close the gap between rural and urban quality of service and to consider the socio-economic benefits in their business case discussions.
- Development with the industry of a national connectivity register linking addresses to connections to ensure help is provided to the right people.