

### Background to the PGA

The Pastoralists and Grazier's Association (PGA) is a non-profit industry organization established in 1907, which represents primary producers in pastoral and agricultural regions of Western Australia. The PGA is the only Western Australian State Farmer Member of the National Farmers' Federation and participates in key industry and commodity groups. We have a strong membership from all facets of the broadacre agricultural industry, including farmers, pastoralists, graingrowers and sheep and cattle graziers. The PGA has a state-wide District Committee structure which enables grass-roots input on all policy matters including telecommunications services for our members in regional, rural and remote areas of Western Australia (WA).

### Broadband Connect

The HiBIS Program has been very successful in allowing many rural business, and the individuals associated, in regional and remote areas to access services and perform tasks via the internet that are taken as basic necessities in the metropolitan areas. The PGA is very pleased to see the program continuing with an increased budget. We also hope that the simplified name of the program indicates a move towards more targeted and effective communication with the end user and the community in general.

Q1. Providing plain English, easy to access information on the program that is targeted towards end users would be of great assistance. Many eligible people have been informed by a provider that the program has closed and funding is no longer available when it was only that provider's allocation that had been exhausted. Independent advice on the program, and what it should provide to end users, is very important and needs to be improved in the transition from HiBIS to BC.

Q2. The HiBIS program has been a huge success in the rural and remote areas of Western Australia. Our members who have been able to undertake infrastructure, and therefore service upgrades now have a level of service that allows them to more efficiently carry out their internet business needs. Many people however are not aware of this program. The PGA has made a concerted effort to raise awareness within our membership. Better communication regarding the program would help to maximise the benefit delivered to rural and remote Western Australians in general.

Q3. The current funding arrangements have worked reasonably well. Many rural and remote landholders in WA can only access sufficient mobile coverage through the Telstra CDMA network and prefer to have their entire telecommunications requirements with one provider for simplicities sake. For this reason the maximum allocation rule may need to be revisited, as interested people have informed the PGA that they have decided not to progress with an upgrade because they were not able continue having all services through one provider.

Q 12-17. In many areas of WA satellite is the only technology that is available and services those areas quite well. The PGA believes that as faster and more advanced technologies become available, and are proven, they should be encouraged over lesser technologies in the interest of efficient investment in telecommunications infrastructure. These comments are also relevant to questions 24-27.

Q 28-30. The PGA believes that the current cap system is very beneficial to ensuring that those most remote rural business to have some equity in pricing, as they would most likely be subject to much higher prices if costs were purely based on market forces. This being said, there may be great benefit to regional rural business generally.

The PGA is not able to comment on the merit of technical proposals in other questions.