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MEDIA RELEASE

180 residents left with no phones.....again!

Diamantina Shire Council is once again disappointed as ailing telephone technology has left its Bedourie residents cut off. Phones were out yesterday and were expected to be out for another day, however connection was restored late yesterday. The Shire has been lobbying with its neighbour, Barcoo Shire Council for about a decade to convince government and Telstra to upgrade infrastructure.

“Outages are becoming more frequent and both the communities of Birdsville and Bedourie and the surrounding areas are experiencing break downs more frequently and for increasing periods of time”, Mayor of Diamantina Shire Council, Cr Geoff Morton said. “We are part of that forgotten percentage of Australians located in the Country’s inland that only matter when convenient. We have been working on a solution to build two fibre tails to service five communities to eliminate this type of problem, but to date, have been unsuccessful in convincing government to partner with us to address the market failure that exists. It’s not as if we want a hand out, we just need government to have more of a pioneering backbone to address communications infrastructure need that most of Australia takes for granted.”

Reflecting on the past and the Can-do attitude of the Diamantina Shire and its communities, Cr Morton mused “That in the mid 80’s we paid Telecom to put phones into Birdsville, and not much has changed as we now seek to leverage funding from the State and National Governments with \$2.4m to buy a better solution than the NBN can offer.” He said that “the only real hope at this stage is the Coalitions Co-Funding Strategy for fibre extensions under their “Fast Broadband and an Affordable NBN” Policy and I thank and acknowledge the efforts of Bruce Scott MP, our Federal Member for Maranoa for his determination to support our plight by offering an alternative to the approach to the NBN and what it will do for the bush.”

Wanting to return to the imminent problem, Cr Morton is becoming impatient with the single channel radio link that has once again left Bedourie cut off from the world. Apart from a satellite phone, there is no way to contact Police or the Flying Doctor in the event of an emergency. No one can be contacted by friends or family or in turn contact them. It’s not right that in 2013 in an environment where communications are essential, that 180 Australians should be cut off like this!”

Council’s Chief Executive Officer, Scott Mason has had to make a decision that does not bode well with him to get through the period of no service. Relocating a satellite trailer from a remote work camp will mean that a satellite phone link can be established at the Administration Centre in Bedourie. He said: “that it is risk to Workplace Health and Safety of the employees in the camp to remove their satellite link, but it is also important that the Administration Centre has one phone to call

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SUSTAINABLY DEVELOPING THE OUTBACK

in and out on. He went on to say that you should not have to compromise safety for connectivity, but with the situation as it is, what can one do. I just implore those that have responsibility for this archaic infrastructure to move swiftly to ensure the period of disruption is minimised”.

Ends

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