



Education and Health Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly Committee Office
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Email: laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Education and Health Standing Committee,

RE: NEWROC Submission to Inquiry into Digital Innovation in Secondary Education

The North Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (NEWROC) appreciates the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into Digital Innovation in Secondary Education.

NEWROC comprises the Local Government Authorities of Wyalkatchem, Koorda, Mt Marshall, Mukinbudin, Nungarin and Trayning. These six LGAs cover an area of just over 2 million hectares at the edge of the South West Integrated System, approximately 3+ hours' drive north east of Perth.

Within this region live 2,612 people (as at last Census) operating 455 small businesses, with two hospitals, two District High Schools (Mukinbudin and Wyalkatchem) and five primary schools (Koorda, Beacon, Bencubbin, Nungarin, Trayning).

The NEWROC would like to make some general comments to the Standing Committee in relation to two points in the Inquiry.

1. How digital innovation can assist secondary students to learn anything, anywhere, anytime

The provision of digital technology and innovation is so important to the District High Schools and the communities of the NEWROC, because it encourages population attraction and retention. The strategic objective of the NEWROC is to deliver economic prosperity to its member local governments and an enabler to this is the provision of high standard education facilities and teaching – both of which can be enabled through digital technology and innovation. The ability of District High Schools in the NEWROC to provide high quality education via digital technologies to students from yr 7 – 12 will help in the retention of current students and their families as well as attract new families.

2. Challenges to implementation including provision of digital infrastructure, resources and technical support

In 2018 a new telecommunications solution was installed across the six NEWROC local governments, funded by the NEWROC and Federal Government. There are 11 telecommunications towers, powered by solar energy, providing high speed internet to residents and businesses in the NEWROC area. The service uses fibre in Merredin (where the NBN is) and wireless technology. To date there are 150 customers on the network, delivered by Crisp Wireless, a Western Australian telecommunications company with sign ups continuing each week.

This high speed internet service is a significant enabler for digital technology and innovation in the schools across the NEWROC.

Mukinbudin DHS is a client of the service and has received excellent speed and improved efficiencies within the organisation. Additionally the educational opportunities which have resulted due to this high speed internet service have been numerous and going into the future it will be used for distance education by students and professional development by the teachers – without lag time or down time. The service creates the ability for students and teachers to network and communicate beyond Mukinbudin, learn and connect with students anywhere in the world, access information and learn new skills as well as reduce the need to travel.

A challenge encountered in providing this service to Mukinbudin DHS and in deed other Primary and the District High School in the NEWROC, who are yet to come on board, has been education department procurement. The inability of the local schools to make decisions such as who their internet provider is has resulted in schools within the NEWROC, who are ready to come on board with the Crisp Wireless service, unable to do so. Mukinbudin DHS were able to make a local decision due to their independent school status, however the other schools in the NEWROC cannot and continue on networks that are unreliable, with low speeds and latency.

Additionally, school budgets cannot accommodate the prices of the superior plans of Crisp Wireless, which in some cases has come down to a minimal amount (\$100 extra a year to be on a Crisp Wireless plan compared to NBN).

The NEWROC is working with the schools to try and help them connect to the local network – whether this be through sponsorship of plans or discussions with the education department.

As an example of how superior the internet service is in the NEWROC, the local Police Stations are currently reviewing their procurement practices and engaging with Crisp Wireless to purchase their plans, because they have recognised how fast the internet speeds are and how far superior the service is to NBN wireless and satellite, resulting in improved staff efficiencies and communication.

In summary, the NEWROC encourages the Committee to:

- pursue digital technology and innovation in the provision of secondary education, particularly in rural communities because it ultimately assists in population and retention, so too educational equity with metropolitan counterparts and
- review education department procurement policies and processes so that District High Schools in the NEWROC can take up high speed internet plans which help facilitate digital technologies and innovation in secondary education.

NEWROC would be pleased to be involved in further discussions with the Committee in relation to this submission or to help develop a case study of the importance of high speed internet in rural education. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact our Executive Officer, Caroline Robinson

Yours sincerely

Cr Quentin Davies
Chair
NEWROC
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