



Digital service collaboration brilliant for rural NZ

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A rural health leader says she's absolutely thrilled digital service providers and rivals Vodafone, Spark and 2degrees are joining forces to help with rural broadband.

Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHAANZ) chief executive Michelle Thompson says it is heartening that the three companies are working together for the common good so rural people and isolated communities will benefit.

Spark, Vodafone and 2degrees have submitted a joint proposal to build and share 520 new cellphone towers that would provide 4G mobile and home broadband and cellphone services to rural areas.

The plan would see the area of New Zealand that was covered by mobile services increase by a quarter and would extend mobile coverage to another 1200 kilometres of state highway.

Thompson says rural people need excellent access to modern communication systems so it would increase access to their health and social services, enhance their rural lifestyles and enable profitable rural business communities.

"Rural communities depend on reliable and high quality broadband and mobile connectivity to operate productive businesses, attract and retain employees, maintain social connections and increase access to high quality health and social services.

"Rural New Zealand has black spots which are risking lives and their livelihoods and also posing a serious safety hazard for tourists, residents and migrant workers as they travel around remote and isolated areas.

"It's election year and we want the government to promise us that all rural medical facilities will be connected to fibre-like speeds by 2019. We want to have multiple carrier mobile coverage on all state highways by 2019. We want 99 percent of the population with more than 50Mbps by 2020 rather than 2025.

"It's not much to ask and we pay taxes just as people in cities do. I'd really like to pay tribute to Vodafone, a strategic supporter of RHAANZ, and the other digital companies Spark and 2degrees for supporting our rural connectivity priorities.

Rural New Zealand is the population equivalent to New Zealand's second largest city, and rural people live and deal with endless pressures from all aspects of rural life.

Fluctuating international markets, increased business and environmental compliance requirements, dramatic weather and climatic events, increased financial and personal costs of accessing education, and poorer access to health and social services all take a toll on the wellbeing, and vibrancy of rural New Zealand, Thompson says.

For years, government, agribusiness and industry corporates have made decisions about the viability of their services in rural New Zealand. The resulting gradual decline in many rural health, social, education and agribusiness services has eroded the social and commercial structure of rural New Zealand. Better connectivity will be safer and more productive for everyone in remote rural areas, she says.

For more information contact RHAANZ chief executive Michelle Thompson on 021 2347413 or Make Lemonade editor-in-chief Kip Brook on 0275 030188.

Photo: RHAANZ chief executive Michelle Thompson