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Part of the solution: local independent WISPs in regional, rural and remote Australia

Response to the TIO Left Behind report on regional and remote telecommunications

Why WISPs matter

Two recent reports set out, in unusually plain terms, how far regional, rural and remote consumers are being left behind.

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's *Left behind* systemic report (August 2026) analyses almost 28,000 complaints from regional, rural and remote Australia over two financial years, and the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) report, *Connecting communities, reaching every region*, gives the fullest recent account of what the bush actually needs from its telecommunications.

Both reports point to the same underlying problems: services that are slow to install and repair, mobile coverage that is unreliable or absent, limited choice of technology and provider, few backup options when a primary service fails, and outages that carry real safety and economic consequences. The TIO is blunt about the limits of its own role — it can help a consumer with a complaint, but it cannot compel a carrier to build a tower or improve its infrastructure. And there is broad agreement, echoed by the Ombudsman, that there is no single silver bullet.

This paper argues that one part of the solution has been sitting in these communities all along, and is explicitly recognised in the RTIRC report: local, independent Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs). WISPs are not a replacement for the NBN, the mobile carriers or satellite — they are a complementary layer that is embedded in the community, responsive on the ground, and well placed to deliver and service the emerging technology mix if the settings are right.

What the reports actually say about the gap

The TIO's findings map almost exactly to the everyday reality of running a service far from a capital city:

- **Remoteness makes ordinary problems harder to fix.** Consumers describe waiting weeks or months for a technician, appointments cancelled or rescheduled without notice, and repeated trips of hundreds of kilometres to a store or site to resolve an issue that a metropolitan customer would settle in an afternoon.



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- **Mobile coverage falls short of what people need**, with black spots on properties and roads, and lingering effects from the 3G shutdown that left some equipment obsolete.
- **Choice is thin.** Many premises have one practical way to stay connected and no affordable backup. Where satellite is offered as the only option, consumers report high upfront costs, monthly fees beginning before a technician can even install the equipment, and difficulty getting anyone on the phone about the service.
- **Outages create safety and business risk** — from Triple Zero access to EFTPOS, livestock sales, and the ability to check on family — and are prolonged by distance and unreliable power.

The RTIRC report reinforces all of this, and adds a crucial point about **support**.

It calls for a major uplift in connectivity literacy and local, trusted sources of advice. The loss of the Regional Tech Hub's funding in 2026 has removed exactly the kind of independent, tailored help these consumers relied on.

That gap is where a local provider — one that knows the terrain, the properties and the people — **has an obvious role**.

Why local independent WISPs are part of the answer

WISPs deliver broadband in regional areas by transmitting data over radio from a base station to a fixed antenna, as an alternative to wired infrastructure, and they typically serve specific regions where mainstream services are limited or absent. That local focus is their defining strength.

The RTIRC report does not treat WISPs as a footnote. It records that the Committee met with several WISPs and, in some cases, was impressed by their strategic focus and operations — **particularly their ability to quickly restore services after severe weather events**. It notes that these providers offer specialised residential and business services, support local economic activity, provide competition, and fill critical connectivity gaps in underserved regions.

The report goes further, drawing directly on WISPAU's submission. It highlights **"the value of local support"** and the advantage of having a local WISP that can respond quickly to diagnose and resolve on-site performance issues within a customer's home or local network — the very kind of problem the TIO documents consumers struggling with for months. It records WISPAU's argument that WISPs offer a unique opportunity not only to provide backhaul connectivity, but to lead community education and investment and to keep improving services for the community's benefit.

The logic is straightforward. A local WISP:

- **is embedded in the community it serves** — the operator often lives in the same district, understands the topography and the seasonal pressures, and has a direct stake in connectivity working;
- **responds fast because it is close** — no fly-in technician, no cancelled interstate appointment, no "nearest store is a six-hour drive"; and
- **cares about local outcomes** — reputation, word of mouth and community standing matter far more to a regional operator than to a national call centre.

That combination directly addresses the TIO's top complaint themes: delayed action, poor fault resolution, and the absence of anyone locally who can help.

A larger role in the emerging technology mix

The technology landscape in regional Australia is shifting quickly, and it is creating openings for WISPs to do more — if training, accreditation and pricing settings allow it.

Installing and servicing nbn fixed wireless and LEO satellite

NBN Co is upgrading its fixed wireless network and transitioning its satellite footprint from the ageing Sky Muster fleet to low Earth orbit (LEO) capacity through its agreement with Amazon Leo (formerly Project Kuiper). Wholesale LEO pricing has been out for industry consultation, proof-of-concept trials are scheduled, and commercial rollout across the roughly 300,000 premises in the satellite footprint is expected to begin from late 2026, delivered through retail service providers. Meanwhile, the RTIRC report's recommendations on modernising the USO and SIP regimes are explicitly technology-neutral and call for competitive retail and infrastructure options to be prioritised where viable.

This is precisely the point at which local WISPs should be brought in.

With appropriate training and accreditation, regional WISPs are well placed to **install and service nbn fixed wireless and LEO equipment on the ground** — as delivery and maintenance partners, and as local retail service providers of the service in their own right.

Doing so would directly fix the pain points the TIO records: a local, accredited installer means the equipment goes in when it is delivered (not billed a month before anyone can attend), faults are diagnosed in person by someone nearby, and the customer has a name and a face to call rather than a distant queue.

It keeps the technical knowledge — and the money — in the region.



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AFC and the 6 GHz band: faster fixed wireless

Radio technology itself is advancing in ways that materially improve what WISPs can deliver. Automatic Frequency Coordination (AFC) is a database-driven spectrum management system that allows higher-power, standard-power operation in the 6 GHz band while protecting incumbent licensed services through real-time, location- and frequency-specific coordination. Internationally, AFC frameworks are already operating in the United States and Canada, and the ACMA has consulted on enabling AFC in Australia.

WISPAU is not waiting on the sidelines.

It is running a 12-month AFC trial under a scientific licence, in partnership with equipment and chipset vendors and participating WISPs, to demonstrate the reliability and performance of coordinated 6 GHz operation.

Unlocking standard-power, coordinated use of the 6 GHz band would give WISPs **faster services, greater range and better coverage** — real improvements in the field, not just headline speeds — while safeguarding the fixed-service backhaul that incumbents rely on.

Sensible spectrum settings here are one of the cheapest, highest-leverage ways government can improve regional broadband, because they let existing local operators do more with infrastructure that is already in the ground.

What's needed: getting the settings right

None of this happens on its own. To let local WISPs pull their full weight, several things need to change — most of them align with recommendations already in the RTIRC report.

1. **Reduce input costs for regional and remote WISPs.** The single most direct lever is cost. Lower or differentiated wholesale pricing for WISPs *reselling nbn services in regional and remote areas* — and reduced barriers to combining that resale with their own fixed wireless infrastructure — would flow straight through to competitive retail pricing for consumers, while leaving margin for local operators to reinvest, employ locally and respond quickly. The RTIRC report already calls for improved access to **fibre backhaul at competitive pricing**; extending that principle to nbn resale for regional WISPs would compound the benefit. The economic gain is captured in the region, not exported to a metro headquarters.
2. **Create training and accreditation pathways** so WISPs can install and service nbn fixed wireless and LEO equipment to standard. This turns a national rollout into a locally delivered service and shortens repair times.



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3. **Fund job incentives and skills training for WISP operators.** The RTIRC report specifically references WISPAU's proposal for job incentive payments and training to help WISP operators address regional capacity and skill-shortage issues. This is a targeted, high-return investment in local technical capability.
4. **Get the spectrum settings right for AFC and the 6 GHz band,** so coordinated, standard-power fixed wireless can be deployed while incumbents are protected.
5. **Bring WISPs into the policy conversations already underway.** The ACCC's August 2026 inquiry into regional mobile coverage and wholesale access, the implementation of the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation, USO/SIP modernisation, and the RTIRC's proposed national telecommunications data platform (an availability tool so consumers can see what services exist at their address) would all be stronger for including the operators who are physically closest to the problem.

WISPAU: driving better WISPs in the regions

A stronger regional WISP sector needs a strong industry body behind it, and this is where WISPAU's role matters.

WISPAU exists to lift the standard of WISPs across Australia — supporting members on regulatory compliance and business operations, representing the sector to government and regulators, and running practical initiatives like the 6 GHz AFC trial that expand what members can technically deliver.

Better compliance and better-run businesses mean more reliable, more accountable services for regional consumers, and a sector that government and NBN Co can confidently partner with on delivery.

Investing in WISPs is therefore also an investment in the body that is professionalising them.

No silver bullet — but a seat at the table

The Ombudsman is right that there is no single fix for regional connectivity, and this paper does not claim WISPs are one. Mandatory roaming, the UOMO, USO modernisation, LEO satellite, better backup power and stronger consumer protections all have their place. But local independent WISPs are a proven, community-embedded part of the mix that is currently under-used — and the RTIRC report has already made the case that they deliver local support, fast restoration, competition and local economic value.

The opportunity is to formalise and expand that role: train WISPs to install and service the new nbn fixed wireless and LEO technologies, reduce the input costs that hold back regional operators, enable faster radio technologies like AFC in 6 GHz, and bring WISPs into the

policy decisions being made right now.

The result would be faster service, better local knowledge, more competitive pricing and stronger regional economies — outcomes the reports say consumers are still waiting for.

Key sources

- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, *Left behind: Experiences of telco consumers living in regional, rural and remote Australia — Systemic Insights Report*, August 2026.
- Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, *2024 Regional Telecommunications Review: Connecting communities, reaching every region*, December 2024 (CC BY 4.0) — including the Committee's discussion of WISPs and its account of the WISPAU submission.
- ACCC, *ACCC launches mobile services inquiry*, media release, 5 August 2026 (12-month inquiry into regional mobile coverage, domestic roaming and radio access network declaration).
- NBN Co / Amazon Leo (Project Kuiper) agreement and NBN Co wholesale LEO pricing consultation (February 2026); rollout via retail service providers from late 2026, replacing Sky Muster.
- ACMA consultation, *Views on 6 GHz band spectrum sharing for Automatic Frequency Coordination* (2025–26); WISPAU 6 GHz AFC trial.