

5.10. REVIEW OF BLACK SPOT TOWERS IN DOUGLAS SHIRE

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DEPARTMENT Infrastructure

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to: -

1. **Formally decommission the Alexandra Range Television Tower broadcast equipment;**
2. **Decommission the Daintree Village Television Tower 30 June 2022;**
3. **Notify all Daintree Village residents of the tower's decommissioning planned for 30 June 2022;**
4. **Conduct a survey of Shannonvale and Cassowary residents to ascertain how many residents access television channels from the South Mossman Television Tower; and**
5. **Bring the survey results back to Council to be workshopped.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Douglas Shire Council has operated three broadcast television towers since 2004, servicing residents in Cow Bay, Diwan, Daintree Village, Shannonvale and Cassowary.

Over the years, the service has declined such that one tower no longer broadcasts any free to air channels, one broadcasts three of a possible 19 channels and there is one remaining tower which is fully functional.

BACKGROUND

Douglas Shire Council has operated three broadcast television towers since 2004, servicing residents in Cow Bay, Diwan, Daintree Village, Shannonvale and Cassowary.

In May 2011, Cairns Regional Council made the decision to upgrade the South Mossman, Daintree, and Alexandra Range re-transmission sites to digital, instead of opting into the Federal Government's Viewer Access Satellite Television (Vast).

Since that time, due to a lack of spare parts, lack of service agreements with any reliable supplier and changes to broadcast technology, there has been a significant drop in the level of service.

- No channels have been broadcast from the Alexandra Range tower since 2020.
- Of the 19 available free to air channels, only three have been broadcast from the Daintree Village broadcast tower.

- South Mossman tower broadcasts all 19 channels without interruptions. Breakdowns are infrequent but fixed reasonable quickly.

Television broadcasting laws sit with the Federal Government. Accessing television channels sits with individuals, this being the purchase of a television and antennae to receive broadcasts. In the early 2000s, the Federal Government provided grants to local councils to establish television retransmission towers and broadcasting equipment to service areas with poor or no television coverage. Douglas Shire Council applied for three sites, these being:

1. Cow Bay and Diwan (Alexandra Bay tower);
2. Daintree Village; and
3. South Mossman.

With Federal funding to cover the installation of towers and equipment, and no other options available at the time, it was an opportunity to provide a service to residents that would otherwise be beyond ratepayers. Council did not anticipate the maintenance costs would become as onerous as they are, nor did they anticipate platform changes by the national broadcaster impacting ABC and SBS, would require such high renewal costs. Today there are several options, all which can provide a superior service to what Council can provide.

COMMENT

Alexandra Range tower: previous consultation indicated very few people relied upon the service. Over the past year, there have been no complaints from residents about the lack of television broadcasts.

Daintree Village tower: occasional complaint about the lack of ABC, although there's anecdotal evidence some residents have made the switch to alternative services.

Shannonvale / Cassowary – breakdowns are infrequent but when they occur, there is an immediate response from residents to report issues.

PROPOSAL

The Alexandra Range tower be formally decommissioned; the Daintree Village residents be notified the tower will be de-commissioned on 30 June 2022 and that a survey be conducted in Shannonvale and Cassowary to ascertain how many people rely on the service and for the results to be brought back to a Councillor Workshop.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Decommissioning of the Daintree Village broadcast tower is estimated to save Council more than \$20,000 per annum in tower hire fee's, maintenance and repairs from 1 July 2022.

If the South Mossman broadcast tower is decommissioned, due to low demand, the potential saving per annum in maintenance and repairs is estimated to be \$30,000

Formally decommissioning the Alexandra Range tower will generate an estimated saving of over \$5,000 a year on hire fees, due to Council no longer requiring access to the Telstra site and tower.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

By advising residents of future plans for the broadcast towers, residents can plan accordingly.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Potential cost savings

Environmental: Nil

Social: Potential for social isolation for residents who are unable to access free to air television.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

Theme 5 - Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery

Strong governance and financial management are the foundations of the way in which Council will conduct its business and implement the initiatives of the Corporate Plan.

Goal 3 - We will make sound financial decisions by ensuring robust strategic planning, financial management and reporting.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play several roles in certain circumstances, and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Service Provider Council provides many services to the community from roads and waste services to libraries and recreational facilities. Services evolve over time, and it is the Council's mission to ensure that these services are appropriate, delivered efficiently, and designed with the customer at the centre.

CONSULTATION

Internal: Nil

External: Nil

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Residents in Daintree Village, Shannonvale and Cassowary.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil