



THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts

THE HON MARK COULTON MP

Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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NFF to design and run the new Regional Digital Tech Hub

The Australian Government has today announced the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) has been engaged to develop and operate the new Regional Digital Technology Hub.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said that the new Hub will support regional, rural and remote Australians to build their digital capabilities.

"We recognise that regional Australians have unique needs and face different challenges when it comes to digital communications," Minister Fletcher said.

"The new Digital Tech Hub will support people in regional Australia with information to find the right telecommunication solutions for their homes and businesses, and better harness the benefits of connectivity and technology."

Regional Communications Minister, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, said the NFF has a demonstrated understanding of regional, rural and remote Australia and the connectivity needs of Australians living and working outside the major cities.

"The NFF will provide a platform that is focussed on regional consumers and regional issues," Minister Coulton said.

"The Hub will be a resource for all regional, rural and remote Australians.

"People will be able to access support over the phone, through social media and online, to help solve issues with their phone and internet services, find the latest applications for their homes or businesses, and understand their rights as consumers and where to go to escalate faults."

NFF president, Fiona Simson said the Digital Tech Hub is an exciting project for regional Australia and their organisation.

"We look forward to working closely with the team at Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia (BIRRR), whose work has demonstrated how important it is for people in the bush to access support and advice from others who understand their challenges," Ms Simson said.

"That approach of 'by country people, for country people' is the foundation for how the NFF will deliver the Digital Tech Hub.

“COVID-19 has shown us a glimpse of what’s possible, with remote work enabling more people to take advantage of the great lifestyle in regional Australia.

“It’s never been more crucial to help people in regional areas get connected and stay connected. The Digital Tech Hub will help them take full advantage of connected technologies.”

BIRRR Co-founder and Chief Admin, Kristy Sparrow said that BIRRR has long advocated for the need for a specialist troubleshooting team, to help regional Australians with the vast array of connectivity issues often specific to living beyond urban areas.

“We have literally spent tens of thousands of hours on troubleshooting, gaining extensive skills and experience in this space and, as volunteers, we simply could not have continued the large volume of work required,” Ms Sparrow said.

“We know many regional consumers still find telecommunications in the regions difficult to navigate. As a group who knows better than anyone the on-the-ground connectivity challenges facing rural, regional and remote Australia, we wish the NFF team well.”

The NFF was selected to develop and run the Hub following a competitive open tender process. The Hub is expected to be operational and online before the end of 2020.

ENDS

BACKGROUND

- The Digital Technology Hub is part of the Government’s \$220 million *Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package*, which was announced in March 2019 in response to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.
- The Review had found that consumers in regional communities often lack knowledge of how to use different technologies, and how to trouble-shoot issues.
- The Review recommended the development of an online technology hub to provide independent and factual information on digital choices to people in regional areas.

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