Don Mason's property, Warrumbungles, NSW

## Reliable access to essential services key for people living in rural and regional communities

For retired line technician Don Mason, connections to medical and emergency services are critical. Don lives at the base of the Warrumbungle Ranges in the small village of Weetailba, about 50 kilometres from Coolah in the Central West of New South Wales.

With several smaller farms having been sold to large corporates and farming businesses, the population across the district has declined in recent years.

In mid 2020, despite having previously had no issues with his 4G connectivity, Don lost his internet and mobile phone service and started an almost two year 'battle' with his telecommunications provider to get the issue fixed.

> "We went to bed one night and woke up the following morning with no internet or mobile service."

"It was like someone had flicked a switch and cancelled our connection. We went from having good 3-bar 4G coverage to intermittent 1-bar 3G coverage" Don said.

Over the coming months Don had numerous communications - phone and email - with his provider with no resolution to his phone and internet connectivity issue. With limited service, Don was unable to communicate efficiently with his service provider and would often drive the 60km round trip to Coolah or Binnaway to check emails and make calls.

The challenges of the pandemic exacerbated the situation with travel restrictions and reduced interactions with neighbours and their local community taking their toll.

> "Without the RTH's help, knowledge and support, I was fighting on my own and getting nowhere fast."
>
> -- *Don Mason, Warrumbungle Ranges, NSW*

During this time, Don explained that they were repeatedly told that 4G coverage in their area was good and this was later backed by the Regional Tech Hub connectivity report. He couldn't understand why their 4G coverage had been good, and then suddenly changed and they now had such poor coverage.

Don had streaming service accounts (e.g. Netflix), could hotspot to his laptop and had no issues making phone calls, sending texts or emails, and had uninterrupted access to the internet. But when service in the area declined, he unsubscribed to his streaming service accounts as he was no longer able to watch them.

After several months of feeling nothing but frustration, Don decided to jump onto the Telstra Facebook page and ask questions to see if others had had similar issues. It was through this post that Don first heard of the volunteer organisation Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia. He reached out to BIRRR who also suggested he contact the Regional Tech Hub.

> "I had no idea these services even existed. Without them making me aware of these services, who knows how much longer it would have been before we got our issue resolved."

In April 2022, Don contacted the Regional Tech Hub and requested a connectivity report. The report provided Don with the information he needed for his telecommunications provider to investigate further - the issue was not with his house connection.

Regional Tech Hub also raised Don's case with the telecommunications provider, which saw an enquiry undertaken on the local 4G site to determine if the equipment was the cause of the issue. The outcome: the base station enquiries team found three faults with equipment at the base station. The faulty equipment was replaced and the district's 4G connection was restored.

After almost two years of frustrating communications and going back and forth, Don finally has his 4G connection working efficiently again and has the confidence that he can pick up the phone or jump online at any time during the day or night and speak to medical and emergency services if needed, and importantly he can again keep in touch with his family and friends.
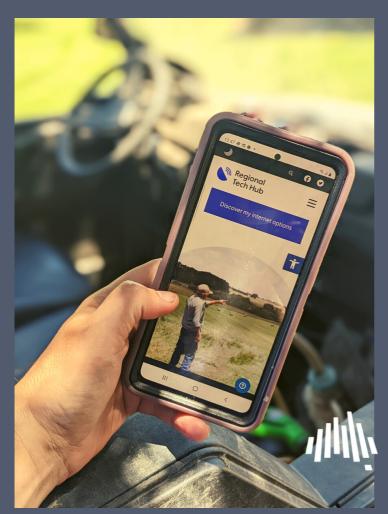
Since the issues with his phone and internet connectivity have been fixed, Don has experienced no further issues. His upload and download speeds allow him to do everything he needs to do and except for during stormy weather, their mobile service is also good.

Don commented that communication with the Hub was great.

"The Regional Tech Hub team kept me in the loop with regular updates. They were so helpful and went in to bat for us, reinforcing the issues we were having with our 4G connection and pushing for further investigation to get to the bottom of the issue and fix the problem. Without their help, knowledge and support I was fighting on my own and getting nowhere fast," explained Don.

"The Hub staff know how to best navigate the complexity of phone and internet connections. They can help people living in rural and regional areas to work out the best systems to allow us to do what we need to do regardless of where we live.

"Just because we choose to live regionally doesn't mean we should be disadvantaged and not able to access basic and essential services."

## About the Regional Tech Hub

The Regional Tech Hub is a government-funded initiative, run by the National Farmers' Federation. We appreciate the strong support of the Minister for Communications and the Department in the delivery of this important service.

Visit the Regional Tech Hub website:
https://regionaltechhub.org.au/
Call our hotline: 1300 081 029
Connect via our Facebook or Twitter

**National Farmers Federation**

**Australian Government**
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts