Regional Digital Strategy

NBN and Murray River Council – June 2024

Digital Plan Framework

1. Introduction

This Digital plan is formulated to identify and progress opportunities to improve digital connectivity and capability for residents and communities of the Murray River Council Local Government Area. If adopted, **nbn** and Murray River Council will have agreed to pursue specified outcomes in the strategic plan.

2. Purpose

A comprehensive local government digital strategy encompasses a broad range of benefits through digital inclusion extending far beyond modernization. The importance of digital inclusion cannot be overstated as digital connectivity is such a critical component at the core of delivering social and economic outcomes. Digital inclusion is about ensuring all Australians can **access** and **use** digital technologies effectively. By integrating both mobile and non-mobile broadband services, as well as supporting digital inclusion and capacity building in a well-defined telecommunications strategy, we can create a more efficient, transparent, and attractive living environment for our communities.

Fixed or non-mobile broadband services directly address the digital divide and spur economic development. Reliable broadband connectivity attracts businesses and investment, creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation. Educational institutions also benefit, enabling remote learning and skill development for residents. The incorporation of known and pending new developments into the Digital Strategy ensures developers understand and engage early in the process for delivery of broadband services.

Whilst Mobile telephone services play a pivotal role in the strategy, **nbn** does not provide or support these services. As such, although the report references mobile network coverage maps sourced from the telco websites, these are provided to maintain a level of awareness of areas where Council may be interested in pursuing improvements.

Digital inclusion is about ensuring that all Australians can access and use digital technologies effectively. We are experiencing an accelerating digital transformation in many aspects of economic and social life. Digital inclusion strategies support the premise that everyone should have the opportunity to benefit from digital technologies to access education, manage their health, access services, participate in cultural activities, organise their finances, follow news and media, and connect with family, friends, and the wider world. The **Australian Digital Inclusion Index** measures and

reports on Digital Inclusion annually, with the results providing a nation-wide benchmark comparison to better inform policy and guide remediation efforts including educational programs such that no regions or communities are left behind.

The development of a Digital Plan incorporates a range of data collection and analysis aimed at understanding the current availability of services, identifying underserved communities or regions, and exploring potential opportunities for future enhancements. Once identified council and community priorities can be set, gauging potential economic and social benefits, and preparing for potential co-funding or investment opportunities.

Furthermore, the strategy contributes to creating a more desirable place to live and work. Remote work opportunities become viable, attracting skilled professionals and fostering economic diversification.

In conclusion, a comprehensive digital telecommunications strategy offers a multi-faceted approach to governance and community development. By integrating mobile and fixed broadband services, governments not only streamline operations and enhance citizen engagement but also stimulate economic growth, improve quality of life, and position their communities as attractive hubs for innovation and opportunity.

3. The Council Vision

Murray River local government area (LGA) was proclaimed in June 2016 and is an amalgamation of the former Murray Shire and Wakool Shire. It covers 11,865 square kilometres and is located along the Murray River bordering the states of New South Wales and Victoria. It is located 800 kilometres south of Sydney and 205 kilometres north of Melbourne at the closest point. The western most settlement, Tooleybuc, is 385 kilometres from Melbourne and 477 kilometres from Adelaide. The main settlements of Murray River LGA are Barham, Koraleigh, Mathoura, Moama, Moulamein, Murray Downs, Tooleybuc and Wakool. A number of rural localities and villages separate these settlements, some containing a cluster of houses and limited services.

Murray River adjoins the LGAs of Berrigan Shire to the east, Edward River and Hay Shire to the north, and Balranald Shire to the west. The Murray River delineates the southern boundary which adjoins the state of Victoria. The Victorian LGAs of Moira, Campaspe, Ganawarra and Swan Hill are located south of the border.

Murray River Council is home to a vibrant mix of riverside communities where relaxed country living and modern-day indulgence collide. We are just over 3 hours from Wagga Wagga and only 2.5 hours from Melbourne. Our population is estimated to be approximately 12,330 with most of our residents residing in one of our seven townships, **Moama, Barham, Wakool, Moulamein, Murray Downs Tooleybuc** and **Mathoura** or our smaller villages of **Bunnaloo, Womboota, Caldwell, Burraboi, Koraleigh, Speewa** and **Goodnight**.

Our Community Vision

Murray River Council has vibrant, diverse and cohesive communities. We are supported by strong local business and primary industries. We value our beautiful waterways and natural surrounds.

Our Mission

To work with each of our unique communities to foster economic growth and prosperity, support community health and wellbeing, and protect and enhance our environment. While planning effectively for the future to ensure appropriate infrastructure and services that will support quality lifestyles and provide recreational opportunities for our Murray River community (for all ages).

4. The Local Context

Direct and indirect challenges are all around us. From elements that affect us from a global perspective, such as climate change and the ongoing effects of COVID-19, to more localised challenges such as poor internet and phone coverage. When looking at where we are now as a Council and a community it is clear to see what our community values and where some of our opportunities and challenges lie.

Our community values:

Our natural environment

- Ability to enjoy the great outdoors.
- Grow our region economically and from a tourism perspective.
- Parks, playgrounds and open spaces.
- Access to medical, health and wellbeing programs.

Our opportunities.

- Affordable to live and raise a family.
- Maximising the visitor economy.
- Diverse economic base and industry development opportunities.

Our challenges.

- Ageing infrastructure assets.
- Poor access to information technology services and communications infrastructure.
- Rapid population growth in some townships.
- Ageing population.
- Cross-border issues.
- Declining population growth in some smaller villages and townships.

By reviewing our values, opportunities and challenges, then developing and working towards strategic objectives to address them, we can work towards achieving our shared vision with the community.

5. Relevant Local, State and Regional Strategies

The following links reference regional and local strategy documents all of which reference the importance of Digital Connectivity and broadband services within the local, regional and state context.
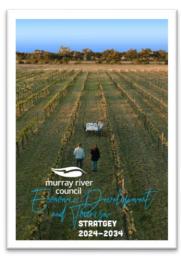
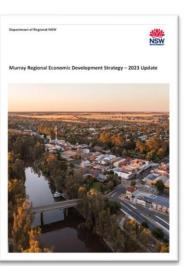**Murray River Council Community Strategic Plan.**

Murray River Council Economic Development and Tourism Strategy

Riverina Murray Regional Plan 2041

Murray River Regional Economic Development Strategy

6. Current **nbn** Digital Connectivity Network Landscape

The larger townships of Moama and Barham are serviced mainly by **nbn** Fibre to the Node (FTTN) technology, with some parts of the town and surrounding areas serviced by **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology (see following maps).

nbn is committed to keeping ahead of data demand and helping unlock social and economic benefits by pushing fibre deeper into communities and the **Fibre Connect** program is part of nbn's $4.5 billion commitment invest in Australia's digital backbone. **Nbn** has committed to upgrading the **nbn** network to enable approximately 90 per cent of the Fixed Line footprint to access plans based on **nbn** Home Ultrafast, the fastest **nbn** wholesale residential speed tier with peak wholesale download speeds from 500 Mbps to close to 1 Gbps, by December 2025[1].

The **nbn** network is being progressively reviewed to this end, with areas approved for fibre upgrade enabling customers to request an eligible* **nbn** Fibre to the Premises plan via their Retail Service Provider. Maps provided in this Digital Plan show areas within the townships of West Wyalong and Wyalong that are currently under review as part of the **nbn Fibre Connect** program. Once a customer has ordered an upgraded service as part of the Fibre Connect program additional work will be required. As nbn is a wholesaler this is arranged via an nbn FTTP retail service provider.

A retail service provider will book in the required appointments with an nbn approved technician to begin the upgrade that will include installing both new nbn equipment inside and outside of the premises to complete the upgrade. Temporary service interruptions during the process As we are working with a live network, there could be temporary service interruptions during the pre-installation visit and installation appointment.

Further details can be found at the www.nbnco.com.au home page, where customers can check their address or register for updates.

[1] *Regardless of the retail service you purchase, the actual maximum wholesale speeds delivered to RSPs will be less than 1Gbps due to **nbn** equipment and network limitations. In addition, HFC Home Ultrafast speeds will fall anywhere in the range of 500Mbps to close to 1Gbps and operate with a maximum sustained information rate of 750Mbps. Your experience may vary due to factors such as your **nbn**° access technology, chosen provider, plan and equipment.*

[2] *Conditions, eligibility criteria and costs will apply – please speak with your preferred provider. Eligibility criteria includes among other things, being designated by **nbn** as a simple premises and placing an order for an **nbn**° powered plan based on an eligible wholesale speed tier. Additional costs may apply to providers, who may choose to pass this charge onto their customers.*

The following **nbn** technology footprint mapping (Sections 9 and 11) provide an outline of where fibre upgrades are ready, approved, pending assessment or not yet under consideration.

Other villages such as Mathoura and surrounds within Murray River Council are currently serviced by nbn Fixed Wireless Broadband, with all outlying areas covered by nbn Satellite Broadband.

It is important to note that nbn has commenced a major upgrade program to further enhance its entire national Wireless Broadband network by the end of 2024, including;

- Increasing backhaul capacity in the network with the aim of improving download performance in the busiest hour of the day to a minimum of 50Mbps for all users.
- Increasing the potential range of the service from the current 14km to a maximum of 29km from the Fixed Wireless tower. This extended range may be impacted by terrain and other line of sight interference.
- Increasing download performance and introducing high speed tiers at 250Mbps and 400Mbps, capable of bursting to 425Mbps.

These upgrades will be performed on all Fixed Wireless sites within Murray River Council by end December 2024

Additionally, nbn and Murray River Council have successfully applied for co funding to construct new nbn **Fixed Wireless Broadband towers to cover communities in and surrounding Murray Downs, Koraleigh, Tooleybuc, Moulamein and Wakool. Detailed mapping is included in this document. These proposed new broadband footprint maps are shown in section 7.**

It is important to note that nbn **Sky Muster satellite broadband covers all regional areas not within the fixed line or wireless broadband footprint.**

There have been significant advances in **nbn** satellite technology over recent years. **nbn** has two satellite options, **Sky Muster** and **Sky Muster Plus**. Both satellites provide cost effective and reliable home or business broadband services, however there are some distinct advantages of the Sky Muster Plus service which are available for similar monthly plan fees. Sky Muster Plus only meters streaming video and Virtual Private Network traffic, and as such is a more cost effective and data consumption friendly service.

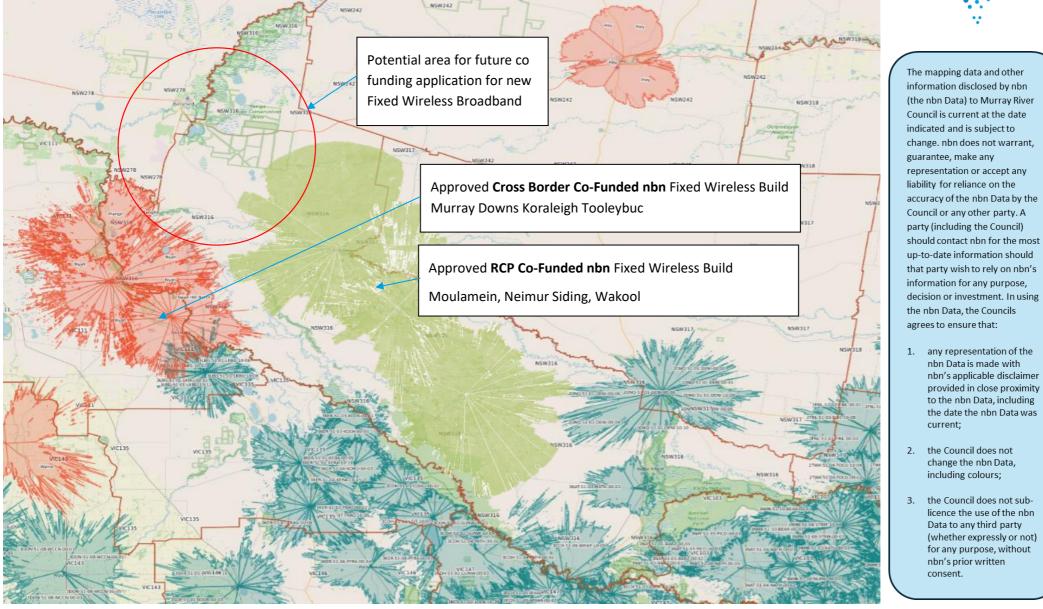**The recently upgraded** nbn **Sky Muster Plus plans have budget as well as Premium unlimited download options, are capable of burst speeds up to 100Mbps***

To determine which technology is available at a specified address, users should enter their address at the **nbn** home page www.nbnco.com.au

* https://www.nbnco.com.au/learn/network-technology/sky-muster-explained/sky-muster-plus-explained.
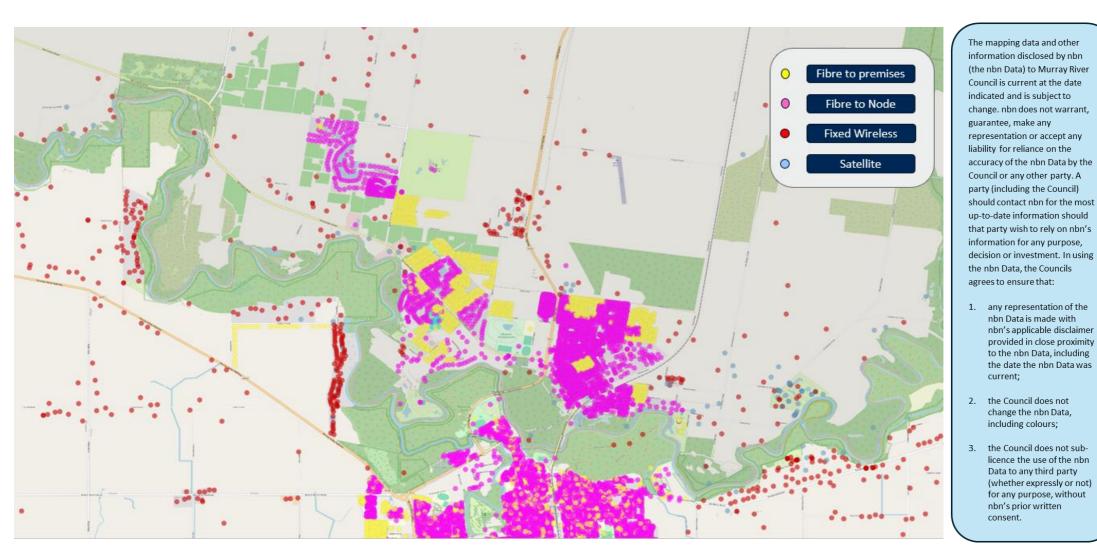
Potential area for future co funding application for new Fixed Wireless Broadband

Approved **Cross Border Co-Funded nbn** Fixed Wireless Build Murray Downs Koraleigh Tooleybuc

Approved **RCP Co-Funded nbn** Fixed Wireless Build

Moulamein, Neimur Siding, Wakool

The mapping data and other information disclosed by nbn (the nbn Data) to Murray River Council is current at the date indicated and is subject to change. nbn does not warrant, guarantee, make any representation or accept any liability for reliance on the accuracy of the nbn Data by the Council or any other party. A party (including the Council) should contact nbn for the most up-to-date information should that party wish to rely on nbn's information for any purpose, decision or investment. In using the nbn Data, the Councils agrees to ensure that:

1. any representation of the nbn Data is made with nbn's applicable disclaimer provided in close proximity to the nbn Data, including the date the nbn Data was current;

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8. Moama nbn Technology

Legend:
- Fibre to premises (yellow)
- Fibre to Node (pink)
- Fixed Wireless (red)
- Satellite (blue)

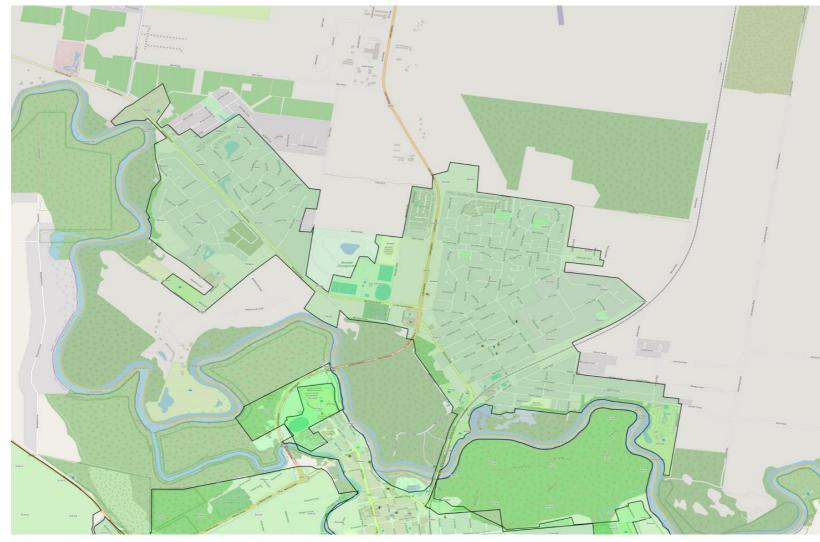## 9. Nbn Business Fibre Zone Moama

The area highlighted on this map, is part of an nbn™ Business Fibre Zone that is eligible for business nbn™ Enterprise Ethernet, our highest-grade Business Fibre service with speeds up to 10Gbps/10Gbps available. Enterprise Ethernet runs upon a complete fibre network, including dedicated fibre between premises and the Fibre Access Node (FAN). This is designed to deliver a premium grade solution that's suited to the demands of businesses, designed to optimise performance and help minimise downtime. **Nbn** delivers this fibre at $0 upfront charge within this zone
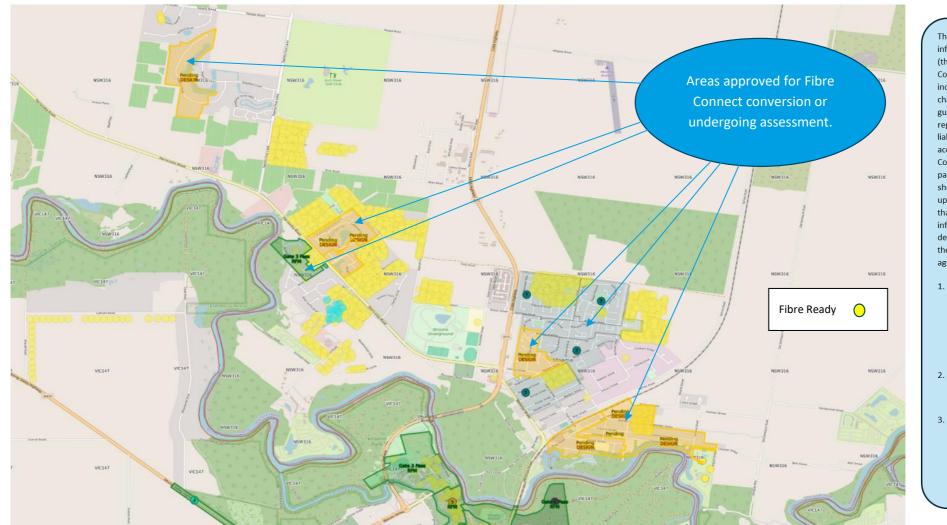

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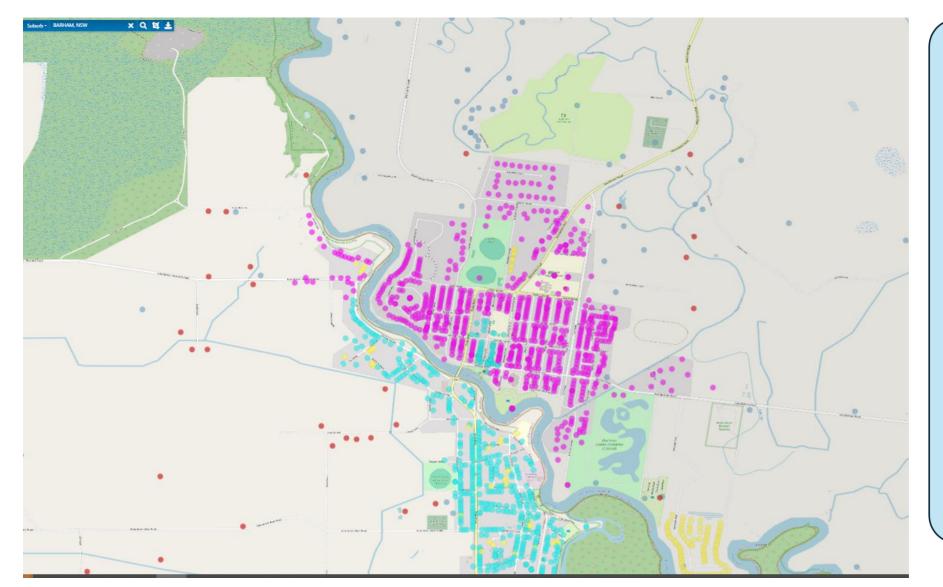
10.   Moama nbn Fibre Connect Progress

Note: Yellow shaded area's already Fibre to Premises

Areas approved for Fibre Connect conversion or undergoing assessment.

Fibre Ready ⬤

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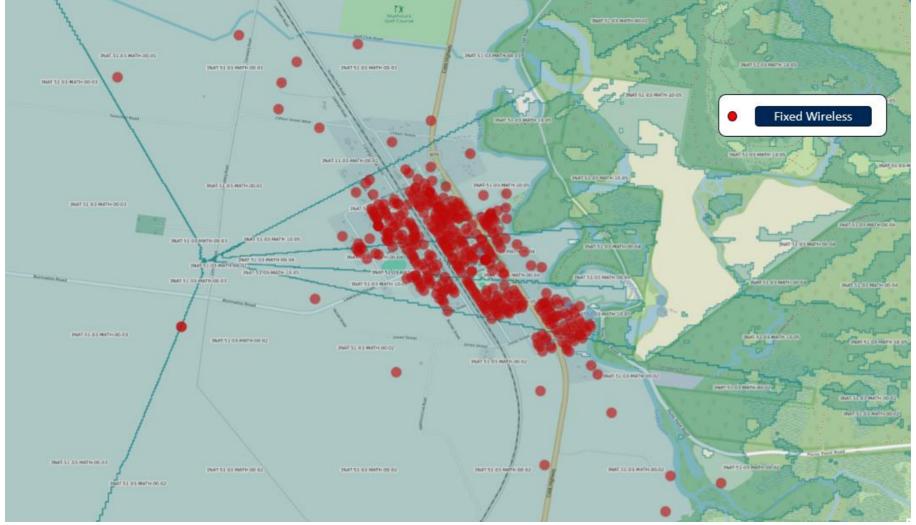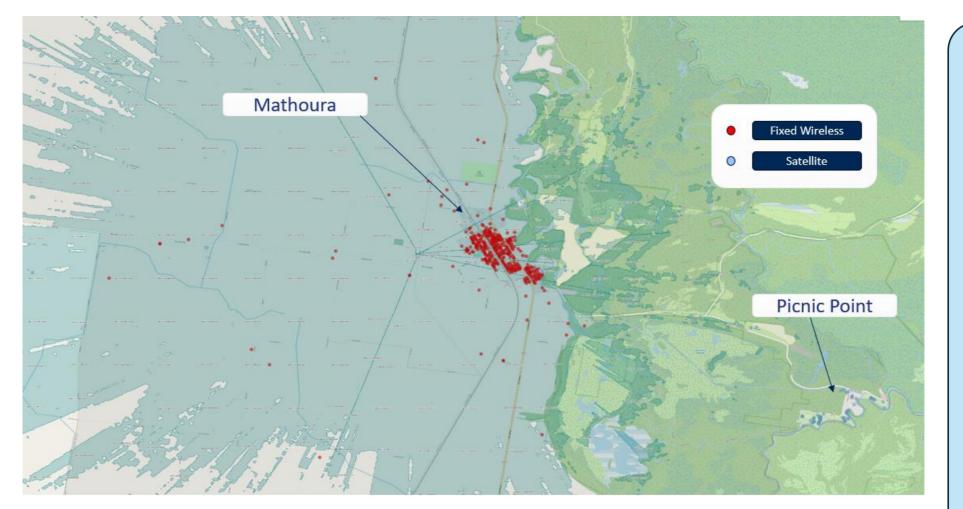
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11. Barham nbn Technology

12. Barham nbn Fibre Connect Progress

Shaded Area Pending Design assessment.

Fibre Ready

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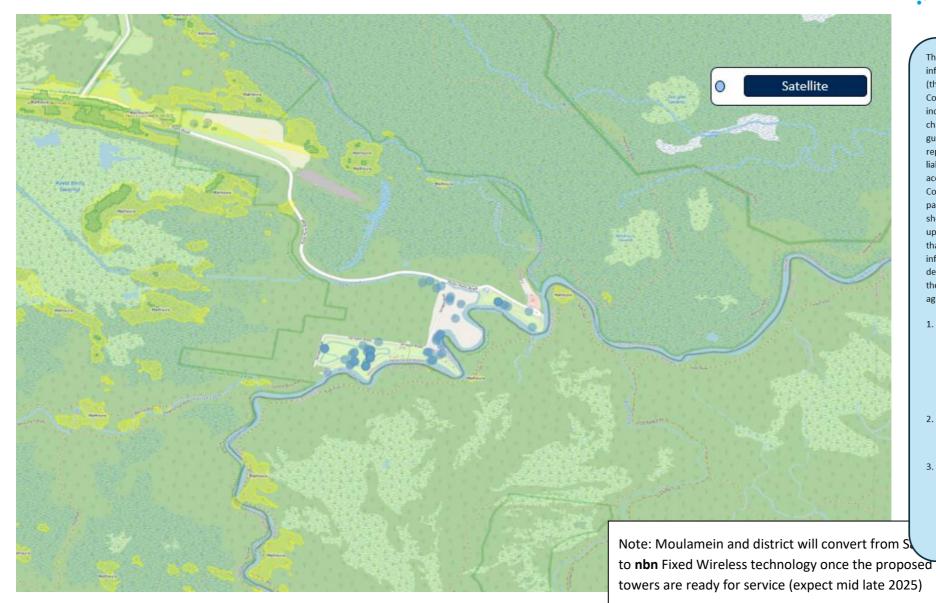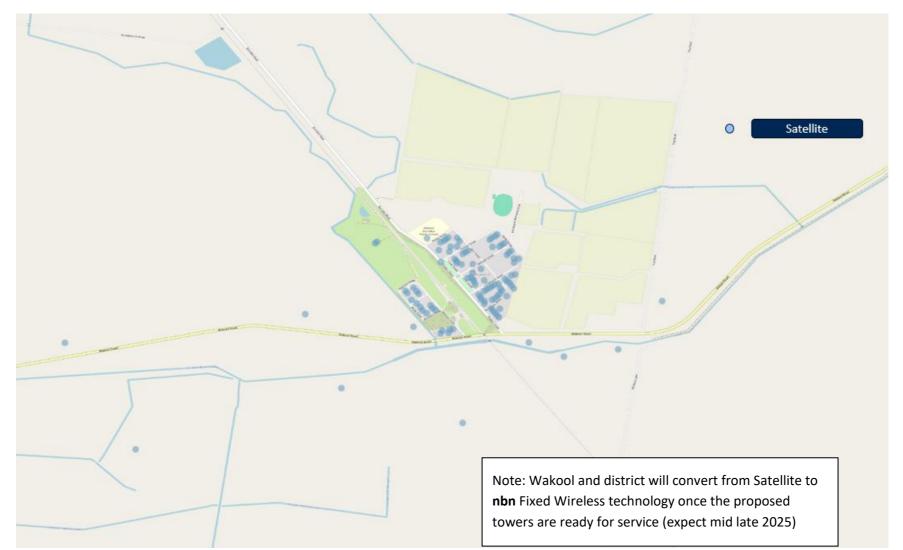
13. Mathoura and Surrounds

Fixed Wireless

Legend:
- Fixed Wireless
- Satellite

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15.   Picnic Point

Satellite

Note: Moulamein and district will convert from S[...]
to **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology once the proposed
towers are ready for service (expect mid late 2025)

16.   Moulamein

17.   Wakool

Satellite

Note: Wakool and district will convert from Satellite to **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology once the proposed towers are ready for service (expect mid late 2025)

18.   Koraleigh

Note: Koraleigh and district will convert from Satellite to **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology once the proposed towers are ready for service (expect mid late 2025)

Satellite

19. Tooleybuc – Goodnight

Note: Tooleybuc, Goodnight and district will convert from Satellite to **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology once the proposed towers are ready for service (expect mid late 2025)

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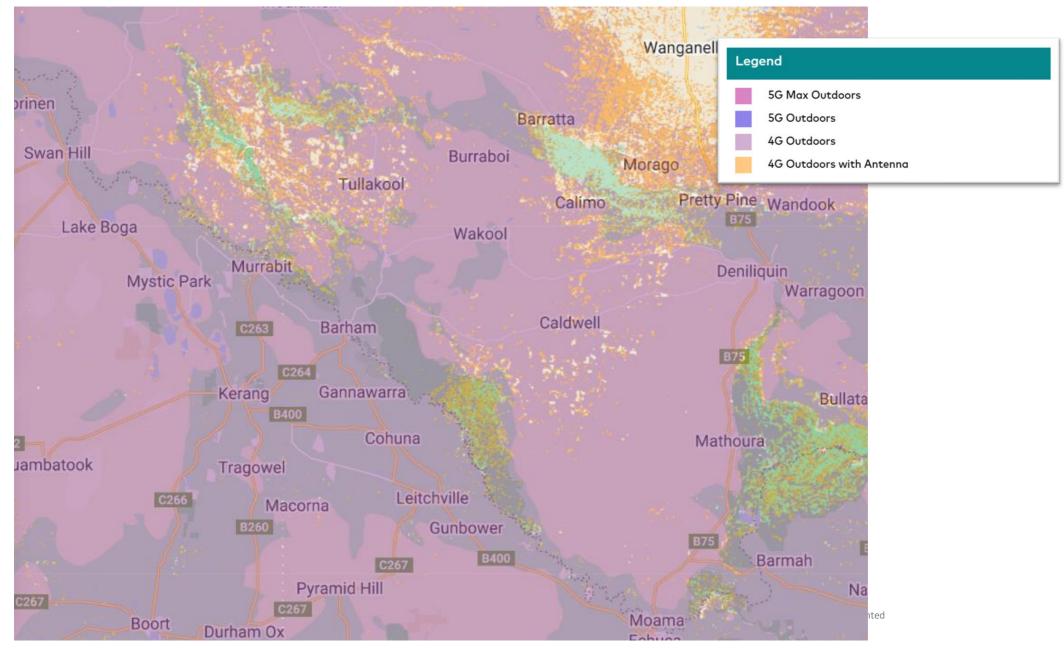
20.   Murray Downs

Note: Murray Downs and district will convert from Satellite to **nbn** Fixed Wireless technology once the proposed towers are ready for service (expect mid late 2025)

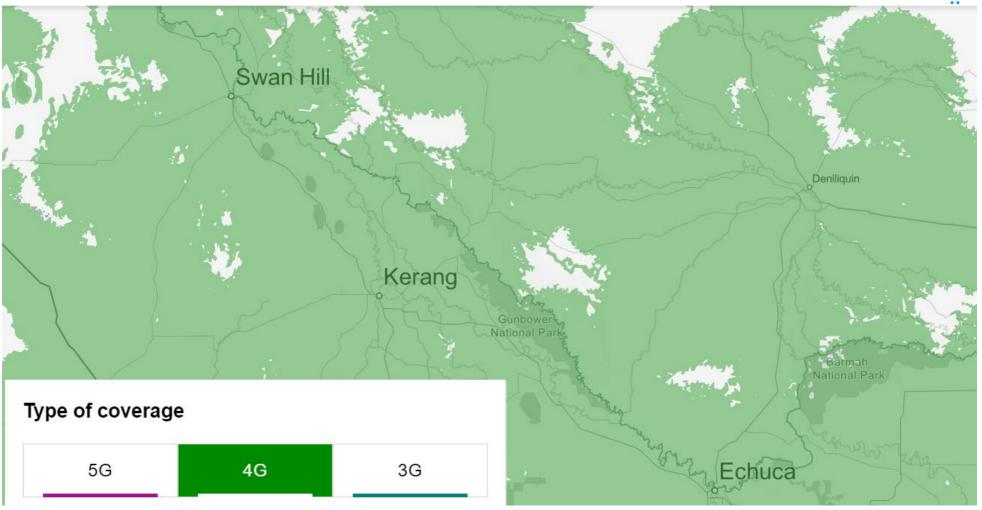# 21.   Mobile Coverage Maps – Optus Network

Note **nbn** does not provide, support, or influence mobile phone networks, these maps are sourced as at 3/6/24 from the providers website and are provided for completeness and reference only.
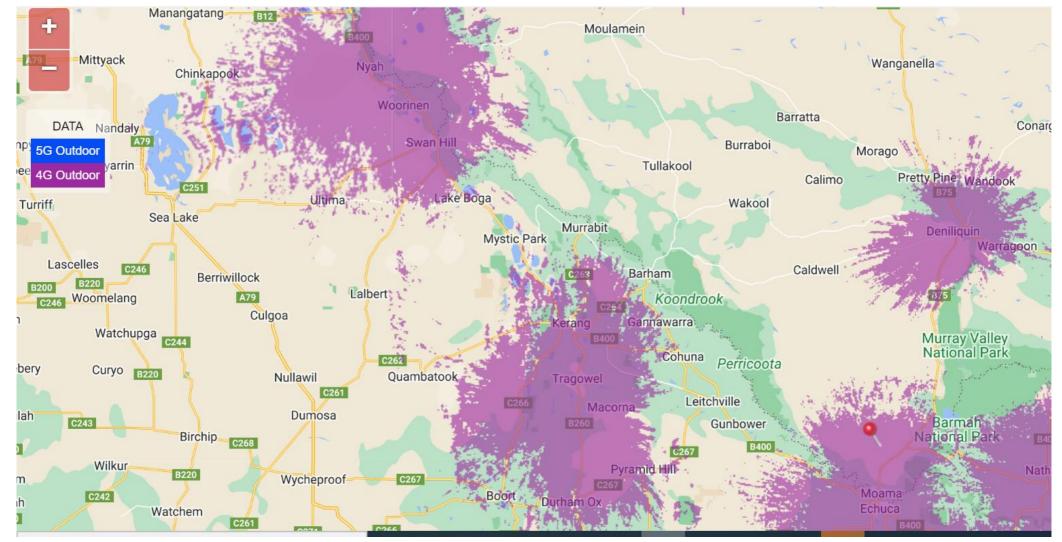

Legend
- 5G Max Outdoors
- 5G Outdoors
- 4G Outdoors
- 4G Outdoors with Antenna

Type of coverage

5G	4G	3G

DATA
5G Outdoor
4G Outdoor

23. Australian Digital Inclusion Index.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII or "Index") uses survey data to measure digital inclusion across three dimensions of Access, Affordability and Digital Ability. A detailed measure of digital inclusion for Australia helps identify critical barriers to inclusion. These may be related to accessing networks, the costs of devices or data, or skills and literacies. Through these measures, the Index can inform initiatives to increase digital inclusion in Australia. The divide in Digital Ability between capital cities and the rest of Australia remains considerable, increasing from 7.0 to 7.7 points. This reflects a different socioeconomic and demographic profile between cities and the rest of Australia, with a generally older population in non-metropolitan areas. The full report can be found here. https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/download-reports

Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)

Local Government Area	ADII Score		Digital Ability		Access		Affordability	
	Score	Gap	Score	Gap	Score	Gap	Score	Gap
Wagga Wagga	73.0	-0.2	65.6	0.7	71.0	-1.0	94.9	-0.1
Albury	71.8	-1.4	63.4	-1.5	70.1	-1.9	94.8	-0.2
Greater Hume Shire	70.3	-2.9	59.9	-5.0	70.0	-2.0	94.7	-0.3
Junee	69.4	-3.8	60.7	-4.2	67.8	-4.2	93.9	-1.1
Edward River	68.3	-4.9	57.5	-7.4	67.7	-4.3	94.2	-0.8
Griffith	68.2	-5.0	57.9	-7.0	66.8	-5.2	93.8	-1.2
Coolamon	68.1	-5.1	56.8	-8.1	67.4	-4.6	94.4	-0.6
Murray River	67.1	-6.1	55.0	-9.9	66.3	-5.7	94.3	-0.7
Wentworth	67.1	-6.1	56.0	-8.9	66.4	-5.6	94.2	-0.8
Federation	67.0	-6.2	55.1	-9.8	65.9	-6.1	94.2	-0.8
Lockhart	66.8	-6.4	54.8	-10.1	66.6	-5.4	94.0	-1.0
Leeton	66.8	-6.4	55.7	-9.2	64.9	-7.1	94.0	-1.0
Carrathool	66.6	-6.6	58.9	-6.0	65.1	-6.9	94.3	-0.7
Bland	66.5	-6.7	54.5	-10.4	65.3	-6.7	93.9	-1.1
Cootamundra-Gundagai	66.4	-6.8	54.7	-10.2	65.4	-6.6	93.9	-1.1
Murrumbidgee	66.4	-6.8	54.8	-10.1	65.4	-6.6	93.9	-1.1
Berrigan	65.7	-7.5	53.2	-11.7	64.9	-7.1	93.9	-1.1
Balranald	65.4	-7.8	54.0	-10.9	64.7	-7.3	93.8	-1.2
Temora	65.3	-7.9	52.1	-12.8	65.3	-6.7	93.8	-1.2
Hay	64.7	-8.5	52.9	-12.0	64.3	-7.7	93.8	-1.2
Narrandera	64.6	-8.6	52.2	-12.7	64.1	-7.9	93.6	-1.4

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) shows that Australians with lower levels of digital inclusion have lower levels of income, employment, and education and are therefore not able to take full advantage of the digital economy and opportunities.

24. ADII Findings and Priority Actions

Whilst the Murray River Council region has a quite reasonable combined ADII score, the Digital Ability score drives significant downward pressure. Accordingly, this Digital Strategy recommends conducting more detailed analysis of the region with the support of **nbn** Local and the Council team. This can be done using a customised survey tool called **OSCAR (On-line Skills and Resources),** which will provide specific data on regional locations forming the basis for future educational and support programs.

25. New Developments

Digital connectivity including high speed broadband is no longer a 'nice to have', it is a **must** in attracting new residents, business investment and lifestyle attractiveness. The preferred 'future proof' delivery technology for high-speed broadband is **nbn** Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) which currently provides capacity for near gigabit speeds.
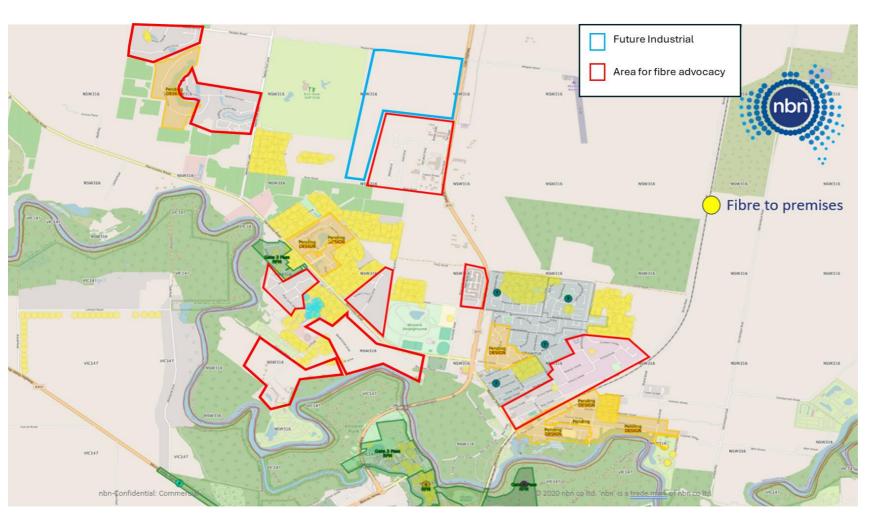
Delivery of FTTP technology is not however guaranteed, potentially requiring a developer to contribute to network extension costs in addition to the standard 'per premise' connection fee. Although **nbn** is the default Statutory Infrastructure Provider as designated by the Telecommunications Act 1997, **nbn** requires developers to engage in the 'New Developments' process by registering at https://www.nbnco.com.au/develop-or-plan-with-the-nbn/new-developments. By engaging in this planning process at the earliest possible time, developers will have the opportunity to liaise on feasibility, potential network connection costs, and to take advantage of potential cost savings through shared access to civil works associated with the development. Failure to engage **nbn** may result in new developments receiving sub optimal connectivity technology, resulting in comparative devaluing of the premises.

This Digital Plan recommends that Murray River Council support early engagement with **nbn** New Developments process, indeed introducing steps to ensure developers acknowledge and demonstrate the development is registered with **nbn** at DA stage.

26. Potential Area's of focus

The identified areas in and around Moama have been identified as a potential concern for future fibre deployment and request for focus by **nbn**. These areas are either on less-than-optimal technology, and not currently being reviewed for **nbn** Fibre Connect. It is acknowledged that Murray River Council would like to jointly advocate for inclusion in future upgrade programs, or possible attraction of a co-investment grant for upgrade. It is proposed that **nbn** pursue costing and funding options to upgrade connectivity in these locations. It must be noted that any outcomes may be subject to feasibility of a supporting grant application.

Legend:
- ☐ Future Industrial
- ☐ Area for fibre advocacy
- ● Fibre to premises

27. Digital Connectivity Priorities and Action Plan

Connectivity Challenges and Opportunities	Recommendation	Action
Mobile Connectivity	Future Black Spot Funding for new mobile towers	Per current and future Telco Strategy documentation.
Fixed or Home Broadband	Seek **nbn** support and advocacy for inclusion in identified regions of Moama in the **nbn** Fibre Connect upgrade program.	**Nbn** and MRC agree to jointly pursue the stated outcomes for inclusion of Fibre Connect in brownfield areas of Moama
Digital Ability and Skills	Support programs to promote digital literacy and provide training to underserved communities	Investigate timing and locations for community training and education in conjunction with Murray River Council Plan
New Developments	Identify growth areas and strategic new developments for broadband connectivity	Council agrees to discuss and communicate in relation to new developments, and to ensure planned developments are registered in **nbn** New Developments process.
Public WiFi	Trial Free public WiFi in major centres	Murray River Council to consider for the future
Emergency management and Response	Collaborate with Telcos to plan for emergency response and connectivity	Agree to communicate with **nbn** and other telco's during emergency situations
Council Assets and Buildings	Collaborate with Telcos to make sure Murray River Council is well equipped to meet the needs for business and community.	Agree to communicate with nbn regarding new council premises or locations in relation to connectivity, technology and equipment.

28. Next Steps - Summary of Digital Connectivity and Capability issues

	Issue	Proposed Remediation
1.	Lack of high-speed low latency broadband in the more remote parts of the Local Government Area. (See diagram section 20)	**Nbn** to complete construction of new Fixed Wireless sites as per indicative mapping. **Nbn** and MRC to develop communications program to inform residents in planned new Fixed Wireless footprint, and to explore options to provide additional Fixed Wireless coverage into regions not proposed to be covered. This may involve feasibility considerations including but not limited to project costs and potential for **nbn** to source co-funding from Government. This could potentially be addressed with support from adjacent and co-beneficiary LGA's
2.	Relatively poor ADII cores in Digital capability require more granular data.	**Nbn** and Murray River Council to facilitate Online Skills and Resources (OSCAR) survey of Council residents with a view to identifying areas of highest need to support with Digital capacity building training.
3.	Uplifting Digital capability	Nbn and Murray River Council agree supporting and assisting to organise face to face and or on-line digital program designed to uplift Digital skills in the identified communities.
4.	Community Awareness of Upgrade locations and planned network interruptions	Murray River Council agree to support nbn in raising awareness of new high speed broadband connectivity as it becomes available, and to raise awareness of any planned network interruptions required to deliver the network upgrades.
5.	Registration of New Developments with **nbn**	Murray River Council agree to encourage developers to register and implement a step in the Development Application process to ensure this occurs.

29. Acceptance and agreement to adopt and progress nbn Digital Strategy recommendations as outlined in Section 28.

Signed on behalf of Murray River Council.

    Name:

    Signed:

    Position:

    Date: /   /2024

Signed on behalf of **nbn**

    Name: Andrew Cottrill

    Signed:

    Position: Regional Development and Engagement Manager

    Date: ____/___/2024