

Enterprise North Canterbury's Submission to Digital Strategy 2.0

Connection

Connection is the number one priority for people and businesses in North Canterbury. Lack of broadband access has now become a major barrier to development and productivity in the region.

Confidence, content and collaboration rank a distant second. Take, for example, vehicles as an analogy. North Canterbury has people who know how to drive, would love to collaborate, and have some good ideas about what they would put in a car (content) – but at present residents and businesses are riding bicycles. The region has many businesses trying to be productive using dial-up internet services.

Enterprise North Canterbury (ENC), as the region's economic development agency, would like a third priority added into the connection priorities that specifically encompasses 'rural community access to broadband'. ENC urges Government in terms of its policy to have regard to rural businesses – given that they are the backbone of the economic performance of New Zealand.

Once North Canterbury's businesses and people have improved connections, ENC agrees with the confidence and content goals. It also agrees that collaboration is critical – but would like the role of economic development agencies highlighted in this.

Enterprise North Canterbury is regularly coming into contact with businesses struggling with internet access. One example of this is a global software company presently operating in Selwyn that wanted to move to North Canterbury but could not do so due to extraordinarily poor broadband access in the region. ENC had another business – run by a British immigrant – that was forced to move to Christchurch. Many businesses simply cannot access internet banking or improve their supply chain and distribution management due to inadequate access.

Recommendations

1. ENC wants the Digital Strategy to specifically identify rural community broadband access as a priority under connections
2. ENC wants Government to consider extending the Broadband Challenge fund to enable rural areas such as North Canterbury to investigate and implement extending the broadband and wireless network throughout the region
3. ENC is willing to provide leadership in North Canterbury to develop partnerships and establish a collaborative taskforce to find an innovative solution to the digital divide in the region, and drive the uptake of broadband and ICT use to enable businesses to run more effectively
4. ENC urgently wants broadband for all at an affordable price for North Canterbury communities and businesses