



WISPs

The ideal source of Rural Broadband





From the WISPA-NZ President

Wireless ISPs or WISPs are very well known locally but less so nationally. So the opportunity to bid for RBI2 – the government’s next round of subsidies for rural broadband – is big for us.

WISPs provide high quality broadband in hard to reach places which the national operators shy away from because of low population density and challenging topography.

Many of our WISP members have collaborated in putting their RBI2 bids together. We recognise that it will be easier for Crown Fibre Holdings to work with a significant number of WISPs covering the majority of the target area, than with just one or two.

Our technology involves taking backhaul from wherever we can and using repeaters from hilltop to hilltop. Our radio technology is often far cheaper than the cellular companies but every bit as robust. Where we can’t get mains power we use solar power, wind power, battery backups and standby generators. Local farmers help us with power and access, in return getting broadband and phone service far better than the national service providers can offer.

In the RBI2 build some of us will be partnering with electricity lines companies for supply of backhaul, using the government’s new access regime for fibre over power poles.

WISPs are the obvious choice for RBI2. Collectively WISPs already have around 40,000 customers in rural New Zealand on high quality, reliable broadband. WISPs have achieved this impressive scale by investing our own money – we have not featured in any earlier rounds of government funding.

WISPs are resilient. For example, in recent civil emergencies in Minginui and Kaikoura the local WISP stayed on line without interruption and for a time was the sole lifeline.

Rural New Zealand is our natural home. We know the high sites, the rural customers, the needs, and the technology. We are small businesses so when something goes wrong the owner is personally involved in the fix.

Farmers and businesses, families and students, or any Kiwi in the remote corners of New Zealand can look forward to new or better access to broadband when the WISPs succeed in our bids. Rural New Zealand is our home, and rural Kiwis are our people.



MATTHEW HARRISON

WISPA-NZ President

WISPs, and RBI2

For the first time the latest round of the government's Rural Broadband Initiative, RBI2, has been specifically designed to attract regional wireless Internet service providers, and a significant number are among the bidders.

The Wireless ISPs – also known as WISPs or regional telcos - comprise more than 30 operators all over New Zealand who deploy leading edge wireless broadband technology in areas uneconomic for the mainstream national companies. They already serve over 40,000 customers, making them collectively the second largest broadband supplier in rural New Zealand.

The latest tender round offers up to \$2 million in each region for the WISPs to expand their coverage and improve their service quality.

The tender has been a major driver in the formation of a new industry association. WISPA-NZ was launched in January 2017 with 16 companies as foundation members, covering most parts of regional New Zealand. Several more have since joined or are in the process of joining. All provide fast Internet connectivity with a strong focus on customer service, and many include voice calling in the package.

Many of our members have bid for the RBI2 process. Some have partnered with their local electricity lines companies, whose expansion into telecommunications has been helped by legislation allowing them to install fibre across their existing power poles on private land.

WISPs and lines companies are a perfect combination to provide a cost-effective alternative to Chorus in the rural markets we serve.

Many WISPs also work with the large national phone companies to ensure the best outcome for rural customers including voice services.

The strength of the WISPs lies in local relationships with farmers and other landowners, and the practical know-how to deploy leading edge technology far more cost-effectively than the national providers.

WISPs are looking forward to becoming an even more effective part of the rural communications landscape. In particular we are committed to bringing broadband to more of the country's farmers and horticulturists, to whom city grade broadband is rapidly becoming a "must have."



Why choose the WISPs

TECHNOLOGY LEADERSHIP

WISPs use solid, rugged 21st century radio equipment, running across a range of spectrum frequencies, specifically designed for modern broadband. Our networks are designed for the era where a household may have several simultaneous users – some accessing Netflix, others uploading files to their school Web site, and others doing emailing or gaming. We are not in the business of trying to adapt cellular technology designed primarily for voice calls to fit the needs of modern broadband users, nor are we looking to pass off outmoded copper wires as a solution for modern rural New Zealand. We are broadband specialists, right up there with 1000-plus WISPs in the USA and numerous other countries.

CUSTOMER SERVICE FOCUS

Like many small, regional businesses we put a huge focus on customer service. We don't have massive, under-resourced, impersonal contact centres with hours of waiting time. Very often the owner of a WISP is personally involved if a service issue arises. Our customer service is better than the main phone companies' for two reasons. First, because we have to be better than them so as to survive and prosper in a highly competitive market. Second, because we want to be the best in the business – our local communities are our home and if we upset a customer chances are we'll be taken to task in the street or a local café.

RELIABLE

WISPs are in this for the long haul. We build our sites, networks and systems with longevity in mind. Recent civil emergencies have shown WISPs as being more resilient than cellular or fixed line services - we have helped our bigger competitors out, not the other way round.

COST EFFECTIVE

The RB12 bids are confidential so we cannot quote specific numbers. Suffice to say that we are confident we can deliver more new rural connections for less than our competitors. Vodafone is on record quoting the cost of a cell tower in its bid for government-funded RB1 as \$500,000. In many situations WISPs can knock two zeroes off that figure. That means more subscribers online, at higher speeds, more affordably, for every taxpayer dollar spent.



WISP FACTS

- Rural New Zealand has at least 30 WISPs of reasonable scale
- All are New Zealand owned, flexible, nimble and truly responsive – mostly with owner-operators
- The oldest of them has been in business for 19 years
- About 20 are members of the new industry group WISPA-NZ
- The average staff number for a WISP is 9. The largest has more than 30 staff, while the smallest has just a working owner
- Many of the staff are former technicians with telecommunications companies
- Collectively the WISPs own and maintain more than 800 radio sites
- While some sites are very large and sophisticated, many are compact, solar powered, and with minimal impact on farming operations
- While fixed wireless broadband is the core product, most WISPs resell some services for mainstream telecommunications companies such as RB11 cellular, DSL, UFB and lines company fibre services. That means they offer a full range of services cost effectively, including voice calling
- Unlike cellular sites, WISP sites are selected for point-to-point property coverage rather than blanket coverage of an area
- The clamour for rural broadband has been a major driver of WISP establishment and growth
- Customer numbers are estimated at more than 40,000, which makes the WISPs in aggregate easily the number 2 source of broadband in rural New Zealand
- WISPA-NZ has been formed so the WISPs can work on common standards, interact with other industry groups, and create a voice for vital infrastructure providers



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