



FROM THE COAST

Communications

We may be known for our beaches and laid back lifestyle, but one thing the Esperance region is not known for is great telecommunications, particularly outside the town centre. A change is in the air! This week representatives of the Shire of Esperance joined State Government, Telstra and stakeholders to celebrate the official launch of two new Mobile Base Stations under the Regional Telecommunications Project (RPT).

Salmon Gums and Grass Patch were the first in our region to receive better access to mobile telephone coverage and high-speed wireless broadband under the project. The launch of these mobile stations is a big step forward in improving communications in Esperance and it will be a big relief for many.

Living in such a vast area, inadequate mobile phone coverage has been a significant, growing issue. Residents and business owners have been challenged when it comes to keeping up with the rest of the world, safety of travellers and emergency response times have been compromised through lack of connectivity, not to mention the social impacts for people already living in a particularly isolated part of the state.

In February this year the State Government announced a \$45 million investment into the Royalties for Regions program to deliver the RTP aiming to cover existing gaps in coverage in small communities. The RTP is now well under way and will deliver a total of 132 mobile towers in Western Australia over three years to mid-2018.

So what will this mean for Esperance? It means enhanced safety and convenience for people living, learning, visiting and working here, better access to mobile voice and high speed data services and a potential increase in commercial opportunities for local businesses, particularly for primary producers who have previously struggled to access reliable and affordable mobile coverage and internet access.

The next areas to receive the base stations in the Esperance region include Beaumont, Dalyup, Dalyup North, Fisheries Road between Condingup and Neridup, Grass Patch East, Merivale, Mt Burdett, Neridup and Scaddan West. All construction for the RTP is due to be completed by December 2018.

The NBN is also not too far away. Contractors have already commenced investigative works in Esperance and you may have seen them around opening Telstra pits as they make an inventory of the existing infrastructure. Homes and businesses in Chadwick, Esperance, Nulsen, Sinclair, West Beach and Castletown were among the 79,000 included in the NBN Co's quarterly update of the national plan and it is expected around 6000 premises will be covered in Esperance and Hopetoun, with construction on the fixed-line infrastructure to start by September.

It's been a long time coming but it is wonderful to see Esperance finally get the fast, reliable and affordable internet and broad mobile coverage we've been waiting for.