



**Submission From:** Tourism Catlins  
The Catlins  
New Zealand

**Submission To:** TSO Review  
Information Technology and Telecommunications Policy  
Ministry of Economic Development  
P.O. Box 1473  
Wellington

**Subject:** Telecommunications Service Obligations Regulatory Framework –  
Discussion Document (August 2007)

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On 26 June 2000, Cabinet confirmed the following vision for the "social and economic inclusion and ICT" (aka closing the digital divide) area of work that had been agreed by the Cabinet Economic Development Committee on 21 June:

*All New Zealanders, either as individuals or as members of communities, have the opportunity to access and effectively use current and emerging information and communications technologies. This will enable individuals and communities to participate fully in the economic, social, educational, cultural and democratic opportunities available in an information society.*

The Catlins is an emerging tourism destination in the South-East of the South Island. Increasing numbers of visitors are coming to this region; attracted by the remote and beautiful coastline, the extensive areas of rainforest, the wildlife and the rural kiwi experience that the area offers. The destination is rapidly changing from a traditional summer holiday destination for Southland and Otago residents, to a destination where international visitors are now in the majority.

Visitor numbers are expected to rise significantly in the next ten years from under 100,000 per annum to over 200,000. This has been attributed to the sealing of The Southern Scenic Route.

It is recognized that a good communication network is an integral component of the tourism industry. Tourism Providers of the Catlins region are facing on a day to day basis the challenges of operating without satisfactory cell phone and internet services.

The Ministry of Economic Development and telecommunication providers must recognise this important issue and take into consideration our comments below. Changes must be made to ensure our communities have the same opportunities as others do in New Zealand.

- (1) The availability of cell phone coverage and internet access throughout the Catlins is an ongoing issue. Cell phone coverage is currently very poor. South of Owaka through to Fortrose coverage is virtually nil.
- (2) The geographic isolation of the area, highlighted by a diverse landscape has meant that local residents rely heavily on having suitable access to email and internet in order to run an effective business whether it be tourism, agriculture or retail. At present there is a feeling that the quality of coverage and access is having a detrimental affect on the ability to operate a successful business.
- (3) The provision of these services is also a concern for visitors to the area. Research has found that this diverse group of people expect to have access to email and the internet should they require it. As well as the inconvenience of not being able to contact friends and relatives, it is also difficult to phone ahead to book accommodation, transport or other activities.
- (4) Our key concern is safety. Travellers through the area are unable to contact emergency services in the event of fire, breakdown or accident. Many locals can testify to having to regularly assist travellers to contact petrol stations, the AA or other break down or tow away services. Unfortunately, few visitors are aware of the lack of cell phone and internet services in this area.
- (5) This issue is recommended as “high priority” in the Catlins Tourism Strategy, prepared by the Department of Tourism of the University of Otago.

## **Tourism Catlins**

The Tourism Catlins Trust works to implement the Catlins Tourism Strategy which contains specific objectives.

Tourism Catlins Objectives are:

- To promote the economic, social, and physical well-being of the residents of The Catlins through the support and implementation of The Catlins Tourism Strategy.
- To plan, manage and promote activities and initiatives that enhance the well being of the people of the Catlins.
- To encourage and promote broad-based active participation in the Trust's activities by the residents of The Catlins, irrespective of age, ability, ethnicity or gender.

The Catlins Tourism Strategy outlines the following objectives relating to improving the infrastructure:

- Objective 8 – To ensure that the infrastructural requirements of the Catlins tourism industry are addressed.
- Objective 8.8.1 That advocacy of the benefits of enhanced cell phone coverage throughout the entire Catlins region are undertaken by the relevant parties.