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Nunavut weighs in at CRTC hearings on broadband internet

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Stakeholders from the North were front and centre at the first two days of the CRTC hearings in Gatineau, Que., on whether broadband Internet is a basic service to which all Canadians need access.



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<http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/termsfuse.htm...> 'If I had better internet I would better my online

In Nunavut, broadband internet is satellite-based, which means there are no regulations that offer limitations on the rates, terms and conditions that internet providers can impose on customers.



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<http://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/termsfuse.htm...> Additional funding for satellite services, whether

For many small businesses like Raanva Design, an Iqaluit boutique that specializes in sealskin garments, the slow, expensive and unreliable internet in Nunavut is a barrier to growing business.

"If I had better internet I would better my online presence and be able to respond better to customers," said Rannva Erlingsdottir Simonsen, the shop's owner.

Erlingsdottir Simonsen added that sealskin coats and gloves are a coveted item for many customers outside of Nunavut, but the limitations with internet service often prevent her from fully exploring these opportunities.

"It's an untapped demand for sure that I could take advantage of better."

Fibre is the future

"Nunavut as a satellite served jurisdiction is always falling farther and farther behind the rest of Canada," said Oana Spinu, executive director of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation.

Spinu delivered a presentation at the CRTC hearing on Tuesday.

She says her organization is asking for three main changes to improve internet services in the territory.

"One is that you need an indexed target that is reviewed periodically and is reflective of what is the average Canadian experience," said Spinu.

She said to date Nunavut has had plateaus in internet service that are a result of short, three-to-four-year funding programs. As a result Nunavut's internet service remains stagnant while the rest of Canada's services change on a regular basis.

Additional funding for satellite, whether it's to maintain a satellite status quo or to upgrade to new satellite services is not the answer, she said.

"We think fibre is essential as a long-term solution," said Spinu.

The third change would be local involvement and local accountability, as she notes none of the telecommunication service providers operating in the North are located or headquartered in Nunavut.

'Market failure'

Nunavut is Canada's largest territory spanning more than two million square kilometres with little population density. Only three businesses, Northwestel, Qiniq and Xplornet Communications Inc., currently provide internet services in all of Nunavut's communities.

"What we have in Nunavut is market failure," said Spinu.

"Market forces alone are insufficient to guarantee that there's adequate telecommunication services in the territory."

That also results in an affordability issue, she said.

"What's happening now is that providers are competing for subsidies and not customers and we're left with parallel regulated monopolies," said Spinu.

Arctic broadband strategy needed

One of the challenges to creating a long term strategy for broadband internet in the Arctic is a lack of continuity, said Spinu. The priorities change from one political administration to the next and the responsibility for carrying out the plans are spread out to various government agencies and departments.

"Right now there isn't a single point of contact for the Arctic broadband issue," said Spinu.

"It poses a challenge because there isn't a kind of coherent single vision for the future of telecommunication in the North."

The CRTC is one organization that can play this role, said Spinu.


Hearings continue

The CRTC's public hearing on basic telecommunications services which started on Monday will conclude on April 28.

More than 25,000 comments were received during the first phase of the consultation and more than 30,000 Canadians filled out the questionnaire during the second phase.

To date the Government of Yukon, the Government of Nunavut, the Kativik Regional Government, and the Northwest Territories Association of Communities have made presentations at the hearings. The Qikiqtaaluk Corporation is scheduled to present on April 13.

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