

Media Release

The Hon Jaala Pulford MLC

Minister for Employment

Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy

Minister for Small Business

Minister for Resources



Saturday, 13 November 2021

CONNECTED: DIGITAL HUB, THEN FREE WIFI FOR ARARAT, LAKE BOLAC

A new Community Hub and Digital Co-Working Space is set to open in Ararat next week, backed by a critical Andrews Labor Government investment.

Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Jaala Pulford today visited the Hub that has been delivered in partnership with the Ararat Rural City Council through the Labor Government's \$3.5 million *Regional Digital Fund* which supports small-scale digital projects identified through the local Regional Partnership.

The Community Hub and Digital Co-Working Space will provide a central location for local businesses and individuals to better connect and collaborate.

It comes as residents, visitors and local businesses in Ararat and Lake Bolac prepare to enjoy access to a world-class free WiFi network thanks to a Labor Government initiative to improve connectivity in regional Victoria.

The Government's \$1.56 million investment will allow the Ararat Rural City Council to deliver the project in partnership with Telstra, building 48 WiFi hotspots to connect Ararat's retail precinct, the Visitor Information Centre, the Ararat Active Corridor and Lake Bolac foreshore.

Due to be complete in early 2022, the fibre and cellular WiFi connectivity will also give council the opportunity to fast-track more "smart city" services like visitor touch-on screens, CCTV and real-time updates on important road closures and emergency alerts.

Ararat will also benefit from a trial of OpenRoaming technology in a partnership between Telstra and Cisco, which will allow users to seamlessly roam across cellular and WiFi networks.

Free public Wi-Fi is a Labor Government election commitment being delivered to improve digital connectivity across regional Victoria. Since 2014, the Government has invested \$130 million in connectivity projects to improve regional connectivity and strengthen the state's economy, including free WiFi services.

Through partnerships with industry and local councils, free WiFi services have been delivered in Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton to better connect regional Victorians. Work is currently underway to deliver free WiFi networks in Geelong and the Latrobe Valley.

To find out more information, visit vic.gov.au/connectingvictoria.

Quote attributable to Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy Jaala Pulford

"Having access to the internet is important for everyone, no matter where they live or what they do, so I'm thrilled Ararat and Lake Bolac will soon have access to free WiFi hotspots at dozens of locations."

Quote attributable to Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas

"This project will benefit so many by improving visitor experiences, helping local businesses and farmers to access technology, and better connecting people to loved ones."

Quotes attributable to Ararat Rural City Council CEO Dr Tim Harrison

"Ararat and Lake Bolac are going to be among the first communities in Australia to benefit from this world-first technology, amplifying opportunities for local investment and innovation."

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