

2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

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SUBMISSION ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Last week our Telstra landline failed. Reporting a fault to Telstra has previously been accomplished by using a satellite phone to report the problem but it has become increasingly difficult to do so, as by the time we have listened to Telstra's spiel, pressed several buttons before actually getting an operator, the satellite has passed over the horizon. Usually after several calls to different operators in remote call centres we could finally tell an operator of our lack of landline.

This time it involved the satellite phone, a handheld UHF radio to wife in house to relay Telstra's instructions (the satellite phone cannot be used in the house) to push buttons on dead phone but to no avail. The Pivotal Sat. phone would not connect with Telstra to report fault.

We drove 4 km to a neighbour's house to find their phone was out also as was a large local area.

We then drove 25 km to an area with mobile coverage, only to be told that there was an 8 minute wait before we could report the fault.

We then drove another 12km to the nearest town of Mudgee to use a public phone to report the fault. The Telstra public phone would not work. We drove another 3 km to use a relative's house phone and finally were able to get through to Telstra.

The whole episode involved 85 km of driving to report the loss of a PRIORITY ASSISTANCE phone (wife has heart problems and husband is a diabetic) and loss of most of a working day. It took 2 days to repair the fault which was in the exchange in town, not in remote rural cabling. When the landline fails again we will have to try emailing Telstra and see what pitfalls will confront us there.

We are unable to have access to caller ID readout and internet speed can only be provided at 19 Kb sec.

We have to rely on satellite internet which is expensive, plus increasing costs of electricity to run the modem. As senior people we find it difficult and time consuming to become computer proficient in spite of doing 2 basic computer courses for seniors.

We have no mobile coverage for 25 km. Having attended a Rural Fire Service training course yesterday we were advised that lack of mobile phone coverage plus inadequate radio transmission towers makes their work very difficult and dangerous, particularly in this area.

We require reliable communication for running our cattle and sheep property and also for personal safety.

Ringling Government departments is a nightmare and time consuming with endless pushing of buttons and trying to determine which section is required for relevant information.

Many rural Government departments require long and expensive calls to mobiles to obtain necessary information. Much time is wasted waiting for return phone calls which may or may not come.

Telstra regards this as a satellite phone area and will not provide additional mobile phone towers. It is unlikely that the NBN Broadband cabling will come here as it is hilly, rocky terrain with few permanent residents.

Our costings are high for unreliable services.

Telstra - \$69.95 monthly

Pivotal sat. phone \$35.00 monthly – over \$3000 paid out so far for an unsatisfactory service.

Mobile phone – prepaid as can only be used in areas with coverage. A monthly plan would be useless as it cannot be used for at least 25 km.

Internet - \$30 monthly plus ever-increasing electricity costs to run modem.

This is most unsatisfactory considering our costs. There are many 3rd World countries with a more reliable communication service than ours.

There is a proposal to build 330 wind turbines within 4 km of our house. We do not know the possible impact on our already poor communication services

There needs to be more funding for mobile phone towers and radio transmission towers for essential services in rural areas. Rural taxpayers deserve the same services that are taken for granted by urban and suburban people.

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