

Noël J Denton RFD ED

M Env Sc Grad Dip Theol B Ec BA Dip Public Admin

[REDACTED]
Mt Waverley Vic 3149
AUSTRALIA

1st December 2011

Regional Teleco Review Secretariat
Dept of B C & D E.
G P O Box 2154
CANBERRA A C T 2601



I write in response to the Issues paper that I have recently received, to express my personal concern on certain issues that affect my life in my country property and in the context of the present poor communications facilities that exist there.

My property is at [REDACTED] in Victoria. It is a journey of 235 kms from Melbourne, North East to Mansfield, turn South on the Jamieson / Woods Pont Road for 52 kms out of Mansfield into the foothills of the High Country. We are 15 kms South of the hamlet of Jamieson, about half way along the road that extends 98 kms from Mansfield to Woods Point.

This is a road that has no alternative. It is the only road into and out of the area around its 98 kms length. It travels through dense bush and mountains. It is in an extremely vulnerable bush fire area. Over the 2006/07 summer, bush fires raged through this area for 69 continuous days, destroying over 1.1 million hectares of the countryside. In tyhe2009/10 fires there were additional areas burnt out but I do not have the figures available.

The problem here is that this one road is the only carrier of vehicles in the whole region. There are no side roads to use to escape fires. Once on the road, the only way is north or south, either further into the fires or out of them, hoping that there is no tree fallen across the escape path or burning a bridge along the way.

It is reasonable for us to expect a good communications systems to depend on in these circumstances but this is not the case. For instance, mobile phones do not work in the area more than a few kilometers South of the township of Jamieson. I recall the horrified response from former Communications Minister Alston when he found he could not use his mobile phone in the area some years ago to make an urgent call. This is something we have had to put up with all of the 20th Century and remaining into the present. This failure ought to have been overcome many years ago but has not.

We have been told that we might get satellite mobile phone cover one day but I understand, whether rightly or not, that smoke from bush fires prevents their use and that in times of fires we would be no better off. We have also faced the issue of who will; provide such communications and at whose cost to a fragmented, sparsely populated community.

Radio is little better. Some people have satellite dishes and can receive AM radio. I am not sure about FM. In my own case I bought an old but updated 1935 model valve radio that gives me reasonable connection to ABC radio 774 in Melbourne, mainly to get news broadcasts and fire warnings.

Television broadcasts are possible with a dish provided by the land owner, but broadcasts come mainly from Queensland and not Victoria. Hence they are of limited value in warnings of fire danger.

Given the above, I believe that we in the country get a really raw deal from government and that people in the cities would never put up with such appalling conditions in the present age. I draw your attention mainly to the fire dangers we face and ask that these become a high level priority to address at an early time.


Noël J Denton

2136.doc

Also at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Kevington, Vic. 3723