

The Secretariat
Regional Telecommunications Review Committee

Dear Secretariat

I am very pleased to see another review of regional telecommunications. I have just opened my file on the previous submissions I made 2002,2003 etc. and am horrified that I could just copy the information and change the dates.

I am pleased to see the familiar names on the Secretariat, in particular, Mr Alun Davies, formerly at Armidale Telstra CountryWide, who will no doubt remember the desperate calls to him to fix mobile reception in the Coolah/Cassilis area after analogue was discontinued. Having Mr Davies on the Secretariat gives us great confidence that this time, the review will have results.

Here is another quote from 2002/2003

At the risk of boring you with my story once again to yet another inquiry, here is my story repeated as per my submission to Senate Inquiry 2002.

Recently we experienced phone and Internet problems, which turned out to be fault(s) on the line from Exchange. The technician changed our line onto the last remaining spare line - all other spare lines were unserviceable. In the course of conversation he mentioned that further up the road there was a junction box where the lines are spliced and the gel had deteriorated. The main line into the exchange has been hanging on the fence for three years following a flood in the creek.

As a matter of interest, a submission on your website was in the name of my neighbour who also reporting a phone line hanging on the fence following a flood. However, though sharing the same name and problem, Ms Jill White is not my neighbour, but from Katherine, Northern Territory.

I think this coincidence confirms that the problems in rural and regional Australia are endemic where the lack of funding for general ongoing maintenance has been outside the budget for many years - since privatisation and staff rationalisation commenced. Contractors are contracted to do specific tasks and Telstra servicemen have only time allotted to get people back on the air - not fix the network faults.

The phone line hanging on the fence was fixed following my submission— took three or four days of work and several machines and so far, has not been washed out again after significant rainfall events.

I doubt if the junction box has been looked at and fortunately, our last line standing has held up! Luckily, because we still have very poor mobile service, text service at a couple of points in the house but no voice service.

Our valley has no terrestrial TV coverage. Our satellite internet service is at 512kbps. It has taken hours to download information from your website in order to put in this submission.

On the Coolah to Cassilis Road (38km) there are possibly three points that you could **stop** and make a call – this is not mobile service, this is pull over and make a call.

Page 11 of Issues Paper 2011-12 Regional Telecommunication Review

4. Developments in the terrestrial and Satellite Mobile Phone sector.

The committee is advised that the three major mobile phone carriers have extended the national coverage of their networks. These carriers estimate that their network coverage extends to:

Vodafone 94% of Australians

Optus 3G – 97%

Telstra Next G – 99%

“equate to around 25% of the Australian landmass”.

Now that is the figure that means most to regional Australians and this is the figure that has not changed significantly since mobile telephony was established in Australia.

Having such limited mobile coverage is a huge impediment to running our business which is a cattle feedlotting operation. Messages and calls on the landline phone have to be physically relayed to wherever my husband or son are working in the cattle yards etc and then they have to come into the office or house to ring back the caller about a delivery, or a part on order or other business matter. The caller is often perplexed when told, “No, there is no mobile reception, I’ll have to go and get him.”

My daughter and son-in-law have recently moved to Ngukurr, Roper River, NT, and we are thrilled that they have coverage so that we can keep in touch.

Q9, 10 they may be able to help you with once they are settled in as they have just arrived in the last two weeks though my son in law was at Minyerri for a year in 2010. His background is computers so if you want a voice on the ground, he would be a valuable contact. [REDACTED]

Another matter that I would like to raise in this submission is another old chestnut from previous submissions.

Issue paper Q 16,17, 18, charges for telecommunications.

We have two fixed lines and six mobile phones on our Telstra account.

We recently had to upgrade mobile handsets and while doing this, an operator noticed that an upgrade to our plan had never been implemented. This gave us \$1,000.00 credit. Despite noticing how high our Telstra bills always are, the angst of ringing them, having to set aside at least 2 to 3 hours to sort it out, is a job that one sets aside for later. Our daughter returned from overseas, needed a new handset, and doggedly pursued Telstra over the account for months –from 6th May 2011- the Telstra Shop girl who originally handled the matter left Telstra without handing over the case so it had to be started all over again. It literally took months to get the credit through and the other new plan was again not implemented until as late as this week, the case is ongoing, 9th December, 2011.

Options are never offered by Telstra, it’s just potluck if you happen to get a switched on operator who knows the plans. This is the same issue I addressed in my 2003 submission to Telecommunications Review.

Currently, I am subscribing to Telstra’s My Telstra Experience, an online survey about their performance. If Telstra would reveal to your Secretariat what results they have from these surveys, it may be helpful in gauging Telstra customer satisfaction level. The only other person that I know who does the survey is another very dissatisfied Telstra customer.

Why do we stay with Telstra? We have no choice in regional areas.

Thank you for patience in reading this submission and we certainly wish you success in advancing the digital capabilities of regional Australia.

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) Carol Richard
[REDACTED]

Cassilis 2329



9 December 2011

www.jrfeedlot.com.au