

Regional Telecommunications Review

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I would like to make a submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review to discuss my family's position and the impacts on us.

We live in the bush. We chose to live here because it is a lovely environment to live in. We have been here for 20 years and in that time, communication has changed a lot. My household currently consists of my husband, my daughter and myself. We have a land line and the internet and my husband and I both have mobile phones. We are in a hilly area, and in marginal area for mobile phone reception. This means while at home we can only send and receive texts, not voice calls, and then only from the window sill of a couple of East facing windows. My phone tells me it picks up signal from sometimes Rosedale, and sometimes Heyfield. This is quite a long way for the signal to travel, and no wonder it is poor by the time it reaches us here. Our internet is provided by the Next G mobile phone signal, which we get through an aerial on the roof. I recently tried to get a new modem, one with the capacity to transmit throughout the house without the need to plug into the modem, but it didn't get enough signal to go through the start up process, so I had to return it. We are stuck with a service that is barely acceptable.

The problems I have are these:

Living in the bush, and needing to be able to communicate both with my family and neighbours in the event of a bush fire, or other emergency, I don't have reliable service.

I have been told I can purchase a cord to plug the mobile phone into the modem to get better reception via the aerial, but in doing that it ceases to become a 'mobile' phone, doesn't it? Even then, it is a choice between either the modem (internet) or the mobile phone, as only one device can be plugged in at a time. What if I need both, like in the event of a bushfire, where I would like to monitor CFA website as well as being able to communicate with my family, and neighbours? This makes me feel nervous and less well protected living in a place where more protection is a better option. Moving house is not always as easy as it sounds and for now, not an option for my family.

My daughter has an intellectual disability and would like a mobile phone. We need to select from a very narrow range of phones, the ones which have the Telstra 'blue tick' for best remote access, ones which my husband and I have but which still only have very limited use while at home. I feel my daughter is vulnerable, and if at home alone, needs to be able to use a phone to contact us should she need to. We have the landline for this for the time being. This is okay, but an added expense and one which some people have the option of getting rid of. We don't have this option, so must pay for both the mobile phones and the landline (and internet access) - no choice to help cut costs as we are in a position of having to have the land line.

Another significant impact our lack of telecommunications access has is on my husband's work. He is employed as a casual, and as such, needs to be contactable for

work, should a shift come up. When calling around, the person at work goes through the list to see who can come in. If my husband doesn't pick up when the call comes in, they just go to the next name, and don't leave a message as they need someone straight away. He has lost work due to not being able to get mobile phone calls, and not being inside by the phone when the landline phone rings. This is a concern as our telecommunications expenses are higher than some (those who can disconnect the land line), yet he loses work due to lack of adequate service. The impact on the family budget goes well beyond telecommunications costs as loss of work opportunity is a significant financial loss.

I would like options that people in town have - good mobile phone coverage where I can make and receive voice calls, text, etc. I would like to be able to pick the mobile phone I want, rather than being restricted in choices to only blue tick phones. I would like to have the choice to disconnect the land line and just use mobile phones if it looks like a good and cost saving idea. I would like internet access which has a good signal, and available throughout the house without the need to plug into the modem.

Internet access is okay and works for the time being. I use the internet for email, to participate in committee meetings, via Skype, and for communication with family and friends. Once again, however, I can't have the best modem available as the newest one I tried which had the capacity to run both the computer and laptop remotely wasn't even able to run a start up process, the signal was so marginal. Back to the old modem, which has the capacity to get a stronger signal.

Although this sounds like a big whinge, the underlying message is one of concern for the well being of my family and the impact we put up with by having poor service.

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