

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

Name of respondent: Michael & Sue Aldred

Name of organisation:

Phone:

Email:

Website (if applicable):

Date: 29 April 2014

Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? No **NO**

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

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If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are pleased to be able to make a submission in response to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

It is encouraging to note that the Coalition government recognises that there are problems with mobile telephone reception in Australia. This applies to regional and rural Australia but also to areas which should not really be regarded as regional or remote but which suffer from poor telecommunications services.

The stimulus for this review appears to have been a pledge of \$100M made before the last federal election to improve mobile services. Unfortunately this pledge was made without anyone having any idea of the scale of the problem and therefore no idea of the cost of solving it.

We live in St Andrews, 36km north east of the Melbourne CBD. Despite the close proximity to Australia's second largest city, the telecommunications in the area are of third world standard – on a good day. This applies to both mobile and fixed telecommunications. Telstra has the “best” mobile service in the area but this is appalling, with poor or no reception in many parts of St Andrews and even worse reception when in buildings. Fixed line services are poor because many properties are at some distance from the exchange. It would seem that Telstra has absolutely no interest in improving these services. This is particularly galling as a fibre optic cable now goes through St Andrews on its way to Kinglake. Both townships were severely affected in the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires; this cable was laid following that disaster. For what reason/s does one community now enjoy first world telecommunications and the other not? Are the reasons political, economic, technical or social? Are the reasons justifiable? Because despite repeated requests by community bushfire recovery groups since 2009, Telstra has refused to allow people in St Andrews access to this technology.

Furthermore, those of us who compare notes in our dealings with Telstra find that we have not been treated equitably, politely or ethically, with some households being provided with free microwave technology, others having to purchase technical equipment at significant cost to boost the poor signal and any potential technical fault/s on Telstra's part being denied out of hand.

The Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper refers to an “*\$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project: to improve mobile coverage along major transport routes, in small communities and in areas that are prone to experiencing natural disasters.*”

In St Andrews we fit two of these categories – we are a small community and

have experienced natural disasters, namely severe bushfires in the 1930s, 1960s and of course in 2009. On Black Saturday, February 7th 2009, numerous properties were completely obliterated by fire on Mullers Rd, Bald Spur Rd, Ninks Rd, Heidelberg/Kinglake Rd, Jacksons Rd and Olives Lane. At least 12 lives were lost in St Andrews and stock, native wildlife and the landscape were destroyed. Thus, as a fire-affected community, we know that communication and regular updated information are vital in an emergency situation and many of us rely on mobile phones/signals for this.

We live on a major scenic tourist transport route linking Nillumbik tourist destinations with the Yarra Valley, a number of National Parks and the winter snow destinations at Lake Mountain and Marysville. Along with many other mountain roads between St Andrews, Kinglake, Healesville & Toolangi the narrow and twisting C746 mountain road from St Andrews to Kinglake is popular with motorcyclists and cyclists on weekends. Road traffic accidents involving motorcyclists, cyclists, cars and even walkers are not infrequent and the poor mobile service means that calling for ambulance assistance in the case of an accident can be problematic.

We note that a number of scenarios have been painted for disbursing the \$100M. Our concern is that the money will be spent where Telstra and/or other providers see the most commercial or even political merit - not for the benefit of any community or group of people.

Cynics might say that the difference in the provision of an improved mobile telephone service in St Andrews may relate to the fact that it sits in the federal electorate of McEwen; an extremely marginal seat currently held by the ALP. Of course we in St Andrews know that you will put the safety of our community over and above any political or economic considerations.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Aldred (Dr)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ms Sue Aldred
Chair, St Andrews Community Centre

[REDACTED]

cc Mr Rob Mitchell MP
Member for McEwen
Rob.Mitchell.MP@aph.gov.au