

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:	Philip Russell (secretary)
Name of organisation:	Gembrook Township Committee
Phone:	██████████
Email:	██████████
Website (if applicable):	N/A
Date:	26 th February, 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? **Yes** **No**

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

My private telephone number and email address appear on this cover sheet and emailed submission. I request that those pieces of information be treated as confidential and be neither publically disseminated nor appear in any publication.

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.



26th February, 2014

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme

Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
Canberra, ACT, 2615

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is a submission from the Gembrook Township Committee, a volunteer community group convened under Section 86 of the Local Government Act.

Gembrook is located in Victoria, 54 kilometres south-east of Melbourne's central business district at the eastern end of the Dandenong Ranges. The area is a mixture of rural and outer urban fringe topography with the 2011 census advising that the population was in excess of 2,100 people.

Gembrook is a popular destination for the residents of Melbourne as it is less than one and a half hours drive from the city centre and is the terminating destination for Puffing Billy, a well known and popular tourist attraction.

There are a number of parks and reserves in the vicinity including the 16,600 hectare Bunyip State Park which borders the town at a number of locations. A short distance away is the 3,500 hectare Kurth Kiln Regional Park. Both these locations are regularly visited destinations for both local residents and tourists.

Also located within the immediate area is Gilwell Park. This 175 hectare property offers facilities that provide a wide range of adventures and activities for the Scouting movement. It has been the venue for literally hundreds of events, including camps, festivals and training sessions. The park has Australian Camping Association and Land for Wildlife accreditation and hosts conferences, corporate workshops and team building programs. In September of this year the park will be hosting Cuboree, an event where as many as 3,500 children and an additional 1,500 adult leaders are anticipated.

It is my understanding that a submission from Gilwell Park in relation to the issue of mobile communication blackspots has previously been submitted, possibly several years ago.

The privilege of residing in or visiting an area surrounded by undulating terrain, native forests, parks and reserves, is unfortunately also accompanied by the inherent risk of susceptibility to bushfires and in Gembrook's case, a distinct abundance of mobile communication blackspots, such as Gilwell Park. The two do not sit comfortably together and combined are a potential recipe for disaster.

Gembrook has again been listed amongst the 52 Victorian towns deemed to be most at risk of impact by a bushfire.

The safety of our residents and of all those that we attract to the area is of paramount importance and this is not the first submission that we have provided in relation to the issue of mobile telecommunication blackspots.

On May 3rd, 2011, the President and the Secretary of the Gembrook Township Committee met with [REDACTED], the Telstra Custom Services Manager and [REDACTED], the Telstra Area General Manager. A number of local Gembrook residents were also present at the meeting which was convened at the office of Laura Smyth who was at that time the local member for the federal electorate of LaTrobe.

The purpose of the meeting was to draw to the attention of Telstra management, the significant areas of mobile phone blackspots that exist to the North and to the South of the township, adversely affecting its many residents and visitors to the area.

During the meeting, Telstra representatives acknowledged the existence of the blackspots and advised that Telstra was giving consideration to the building of a new mobile phone tower to the north of Gembrook. Discussion took place as to the most efficient means of adding the towers' construction to the Telstra planning list. Both [REDACTED] indicated that before any further progress could occur, Telstra were to develop a business case. A tower would need to be positioned on the best site and thus the acquisition of private land may be a consideration.

Those present at the meeting were informed that the proposal could take anywhere from six months to two years before approval was given. [REDACTED] undertook to remain in contact with the Gembrook Township Committee and provide an update in due course.

As there had been no update from Telstra by July, 2011, a representative of the Gembrook Times (township newsletter) contacted the Telstra Acting Area Manager, [REDACTED], who provided the following quote;

"At this stage, the Telstra Five-year Business Plan has been completed and it does include a proposed Gembrook North mobile phone communications tower.

"We are currently in negotiations to determine the time frame when it will be built."

[REDACTED] then provided an undertaking to advise the Gembrook Times representative when the proposed installation was about to occur. It is now two years and six months since that conversation took place and no further communication pertaining to the matter has been received. Telstra have not provided any update or proposed any additional initiatives to address the mobile telecommunication reception blackspots around Gembrook.

The Gembrook Township Committee again submits that the residents and businesses living and operating in these blackspots, being at high risk of both bushfires and of potential wind damage to power and landlines, should have the option of improved mobile phone coverage extended to them as an urgent community safety measure.

A significant proportion of Gembrook's residents are affected by these blackspots. Several years have now passed since the Bushfires Royal Commission into the devastating 2009 Black Saturday fires included in its findings the importance of having the availability of multiple communication channels. It is imperative that the recommended improvement in coverage be delivered without further delay.

The Gembrook Township Committee further submits that due to the classification of Gembrook as being a town deemed to be at high risk of impact from bushfires, the "business as usual" Telstra processes pertaining to the development of business cases before implementing improved infrastructure is, in such circumstances, not acceptable. The telecommunications blackspots affecting Gembrook should be remediated with timeliness having regard to the primary importance of community safety. Commercial business case considerations should in these circumstances be viewed as secondary considerations.

The Gembrook Township Committee therefore respectfully requests the following ;

1. That the previously identified and acknowledged blackspots surrounding the Gembrook township, particularly those located to the north, be included within the scope of this Mobile Coverage Programme for investigation and remediation.

and

2. That Telstra's existing processes pertaining to the decision making process as it relates to the installation of mobile phone towers in fire prone areas be reviewed to formally recognise and increase the importance placed upon community safety outcomes and speed of delivery to such areas.

Thank you for your time and I trust that you will afford due consideration to our submission. I look forward to your response in the near future.

Sincerely,

Philip Russell (Secretary, Gembrook Township Committee)

[Redacted signature block]