

21 June 2015

The Manager  
2015 Regional Telecommunications Review Secretariat  
Department of Communications  
GPO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam

### **REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW 2015**

This is a submission to the 2015 Regional Telecommunications Review. Reference is made to the Issues Paper published on your website.

I make this submission as a private citizen. I presently reside in a capital city but I was raised in a rural area, have lived in regional centres and retain a keen interest in rural Australia. My elderly father resides in a small Victorian country town and I am very aware of his telecommunications needs and experience.

My submission focuses on reliability of services as it is affected by the reliability of mains power supply, specifically in relation to the NBN service and mobile telephone services.

#### **Reliability of NBN service**

This relates primarily to Question 2 of the Issues Paper, but Questions 11 and 13 are also relevant.

The NBN service has been rolled out in the area where I live (South Hobart) and my house was connected over a year ago. I was dismayed to discover, pretty much accidentally, that the service did not operate during a mains power failure. This was of some concern as mains power reliability has diminished here in recent years.

As the Committee is probably aware, telephones connected to the Telstra copper cable telephone network operate during mains power failures because power is supplied from the telephone exchanges, which have battery back-up facilities that maintain power for a long period during mains failures.

On investigation I discovered that the NBN terminal equipment at my house has a battery back-up to provide service in the event of a mains power failure, but it only supplies power at the UNI-V port of the terminal box and not at the alternative UNI-D port. My service provider, Telstra, had connected my service to the UNI-D port.

I complained to Telstra about the matter. They advised that a service would be connected to the UNI-V port only for a customer who has a certified life-threatening medical condition or who has a centrally monitored home security alarm system. No reason or explanation was offered, and it appeared to be just a matter of internal policy.

A Telstra staff member advised me, informally, that there was no technical reason why my voice telephone service could not be connected to the UNI-V port. This was a simple matter and would incur no significant cost. I then lodged a formal complaint with Telstra, after which they relented and reconnected my telephone voice service to the UNI-V port of the NBN terminal box. It works during a power failure.

I am unclear as to why my internet service could not also be connected to the UNI-V port but have not made enquiries about the matter. In any case I understand that I would also require a UPS to operate the modem and computer in the event of mains power failure.

The thing that disturbs me most about this matter is that customers are not warned about loss of NBN service in the event of a mains power failure. As mentioned above, I only discovered this accidentally. There could be disastrous consequences where persons are unaware that the 000 service is unreachable by landline telephone during an emergency.

I think this will be of greater significance in rural areas, where there is greater reliance on landline telephone services and at the same time a less reliable mains power supply.

It seems to me that Telstra and other providers should be required by the Government to always connect voice telephone services to the UNI-V port of the NBN terminal equipment. I request that the Committee give consideration to this matter and make an appropriate recommendation to the Government.

The Committee should also enquire into whether it is possible for internet services to be connected to the UNI-V port, for those customers who need to maintain internet service during mains power failure and who are willing to use UPS equipment. This would be particularly relevant to businesses in rural areas.

### **Reliability of mobile services**

The increasing reliance on mobile telephones in rural areas raises another reliability issue. This relates primarily to [Question 10](#) in the Issues Paper.

I understand that most mobile telephone transceiver stations are not equipped with a back-up power supply, and thus do not operate during a mains power failure. This is a particularly significant issue in remoter areas, where there is likely to be only one mobile telephone provider (usually Telstra) and where mains power supply is often less reliable than in more populated areas.

This issue would affect everyone at various times, but it is a major issue during natural disasters when mains power supply often fails for an extended period. I am aware that this was an issue for the emergency services in 2013 during both the Queensland floods and the Tasmanian bushfires.

I suggest that the Committee consult with the emergency services to obtain further information. In any case the Committee should recommend to the Government that the mobile phone providers be required to install back-up power supply at all mobile telephone transceiver stations. Battery systems are relatively inexpensive nowadays.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Walter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Derek Walter (Mr)