

Regional Telecommunications Review Submission

My submission concerns the issue of **suitability of communications services during emergencies and natural disasters.**

I live on a rural property [REDACTED], Far North Queensland. The property is supplied with mains power through [REDACTED]. Telstra is the only public telecommunications provider in the district. There is a Telstra communications relay tower in the vicinity.

The ABC radio signal is no longer available, since the local council opted to decommission the necessary repeater. So to access ABC radio requires use of an app through mobile service or wi-fi.

My primary communications device is the landline, which serves both the telephone and my wi-fi modem. There is some patchy mobile phone coverage on the property, but not from inside the house. I own a private satellite phone and a PLB to increase my chances of receiving emergency assistance.

The main problem is that when the mains electricity supply is lost, within a short timeframe the repeater tower also ceases to function. Home generated electricity is not necessarily compatible with electronic items such as modems and laptops.

As an example of the consequences: in the days before the approach of Cyclone Jasper in December 2023, there had been a bushfire in my local area which destroyed [REDACTED] infrastructure, resulting in a multi-day power outage and therefore comms outage. That was followed by widespread power outages as the cyclone approached the coast. Knowing that the cyclone was expected to track in this vicinity, I had to resort to contacting a friend on my satellite phone to get weather updates.

Since that event, many members of the local community (especially those operating businesses) have opted to personally purchase a StarLink package. Budgetary constraints have excluded others from doing the same.

Things I think could be improved:

Provide the Telstra tower with reliable solar powered battery backup

Make satphone services like StarLink more affordable and accessible, perhaps through collaboration with Telstra.