

[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]

Dear Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into Regional Telecommunications in Western Australia.

This comes not only from my own personal struggles to obtain reliable service and telecommunications from Telstra, but also with regards to the occurrence of Telstra failure across the town of Nannup, during the weekend of Nannup Music Festival held 1st - 4th March 2024.

I reside in a rural area outside of Busselton [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

I have used Telstra services off and on, my whole life, but recently, for over twenty years. My family here on the farm have used Telstra services as long as phones have been available [REDACTED]. I have struggled with the service many times and been able to reach some form of support from Telstra to either reduce the cost of the service to something fitting a very poor and unreliable signal, to them providing better infrastructure.

The internet here and the mobile phone service both operate on the "mobile signal". Telstra put a High Gain (directional) Antenna on my roof over twelve years ago, to pick up the best signal from the nearest tower at Capel. They had also, at times over the past, offered me a discounted price due to the lack of reliable service which was separate to their normal pricing structure and designed to make up for the trouble our family had obtaining a valid service. This has NOT been offered over the last four years even though I have requested such respect for a poor product and service.

In the period up until 2022 the standard pattern for the internet and mobile phone here is that during peak hours (after school, evenings, the signal would become very weak, and during large events or long weekends in the City of Busselton, we would lose our service for the internet almost entirely.)

Over the last TWO years, the service has dropped off badly and the situation is noticeably worse. We have days where there is little or no internet signal, being unable to connect or load a page, certainly unable to work from home as I have done in the past. Over the last two years I have noticed that where I once could make a phone call from within my house, now I cannot. Calls drop out many times during a call, I often need to go outside (rain, hail or heat) to hold a reliable phone call. Many phone interactions now I am forced to call back several times to complete the conversation. Often my phone says "not registered on the network" meaning it has

dropped off completely and I am uncontactable. I generally use my mobile as rarely as possible except for emergencies or care of my family.

My elderly mother lives [REDACTED] up the road from me (on the same farm) and I am her main caregiver. She has also struggled with Telstra services for so long it is disgusting. Even with a Medical Priority she is left with a mobile phone that constantly drops off the network (as does mine) and needs to be restarted to connect again. This is not something a 91-year-old lady should have to be dealing with. Yet the mobile phone is supposed to be her lifeline for me and others to get help or be in contact quickly. Telstra would not fix her old landline but instead installed a “modem phone” which my mother cannot rely upon and which has made her quite unwell having it powered up near where she sits. I also find that the radiation from mobile phone and modem in my home have a detrimental effect on my health.

Both she and I have landline phones, which we have kept for “emergencies” however we both have numerous calls per day and night from scammers and fraudsters to the point where I keep mine “off the hook” to maintain my sanity. My mother has been caught by scammers already and although she is very switched on to them and how to recognize and avoid them, she hates that her privacy is invaded by such things. We continue to pay for our landlines because in the case of fire or emergency, WE CANNOT RELY ON OUR MOBILE PHONES OR THE INTERNET. And I must point out that there seems to be no protection on our landlines anymore like the “do not call register” – Telstra seems to do nothing to prevent unwanted, scam or unsolicited calls.

So this situation is a massive safety concern for myself and my family. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and have recently had an emergency requiring an ambulance during the night. Fortunately my phone worked at that time! It is not always the case. I am worried that the network failure where we live may cause a tragedy. Especially In my care of my elderly mother and her need for reliable communication. Neither of us can rely on our mobile phones to work all the time.

As for the internet, my signal has become so sporadic and unreliable. I have lodged numerous complaints, and they are draining, the calls, the long explanations, and then having to explain over and over to different “service officers”. Telstra do not seem to keep records on THEIR files of customer’s history. It is exhausting. During the complaint time, a text will arrive on my phone saying they will call “in five minutes”. The text is unanswerable, so that means I cannot tell them if I am not at home or driving a car or in an appointment or a “best time”. They take my non answer as “not interested”. To answer they go through the same process – I have lodged so many complaints over the last two years it is exhausting because I get cut and paste answers and all these assurances that “we are here to help” but they do nothing. They do the same “troubleshooting” and come up with no real solution. Eventually I get so worn down each complaint gets marked as “resolved” or “closed”. And I am told to call back if I wish to reopen a new complaint. I have even in recent times been told by Telstra staff to “contact the TIO” if you want something done.

That just frustrates me that Telstra don't even seem to care.

To make it worse, the charges have increased!! I am paying over \$100 per month for my internet and \$65 for my mobile phone (as well as the cost for the landline). This is ridiculous given how poor the service is. [REDACTED].

I have also found out during my most recent attempts for support from Telstra, that I no longer receive the signal from the Capel Tower (which was traditionally the one I used and that my High Gain antenna was directed to) but from different towers. I had several conversations with Telstra technicians – some tell me I receive signal from an East Wonnerup Tower, some tell me I receive signal from Hayley road tower or even a Nannup tower – both these last two seem ridiculous as between my home and these are over 20-40km of hills, and forests – a terrain that has notoriously been a telecommunications black hole and which still to some degree is – driving between here and Nannup there are many stretches of highway with no mobile phone signal. Telstra have told me to remedy this change of tower for my service I should get someone on my roof to turn the antenna. I am unable to do this, and Telstra refuse to send someone to do it. I don't feel I should have to pay when they set up the aerial to face the correct tower and have not bothered to inform me that I receive my signal from a new direction – though one conversation with an Antenna specialist from Telstra last year informed me that my roof antenna should be perfectly ok to pick up the full signal from the new tower that Telstra have told me is my main signal.

To make things worse for me, I also find that over years of poor or failed internet service, I have been told to switch my modem to WCDMA or to LTE (3G or 4G) only and not allow it to switch back and forth on "auto". The only signal I can even use here at my home is the 3G WCDMA. I do not have any internet if I set my modem to receive the 4G signal only. That does not bode well for me with the discussion around closing down the 3G signal!!

What will I do then? And I am STILL PAYING over \$100 per month for this! I have been fighting Telstra to do their job for the last two years out of fair trade and concern for the safety and wellbeing of my mother, and myself.

NOW, to add to this, we have a similar pattern happening over the hill at Nannup. I wish to comment on this also as [REDACTED] and we hold our award winning Nannup Music Festival on the long weekend in March every year. We are in our 36th year. [REDACTED] We have an influx of visitors to the town each year – estimated at around ten to fifteen thousand over the four days, though we only sell approx. 4000 tickets. I believe that our Chairperson has also lodged a submission with you.

Every year we notice that internet signal is sluggish and slow around the busiest times of the festival. But it is still functional. And phones still work. This year during our festival, not only the internet failed completely, so did the mobile phones.

This was a terrible situation, given I could not even text my committee or ground personnel, or be available for the Emergency Management plan should any such situation arise. The same can be said for anyone who had a Telstra phone. Other carriers' phone services (ie Optus) were fine. Telstra was NOT. At one point my daughter was in a minor accident and I could not call for first aid and had to run to get help. Considering that we have strict protocols on safety and management of our event and take that very seriously, to have telecommunications fail completely was very disturbing and alarming.

Similarly, all EFTPOS failed – not only with our own services but the stallholders who had paid good money to be at the event, and worse still, business owners across town! Anyone with a Telstra sim or who relied upon a Telstra service to run their business was unable to. People were desperate for cash out to even buy food over the weekend, which put immense pressure on local businesses and individuals.

Telstra have informed us, that as a committee staging this event we must pay them a massive sum of money to boost the service. This has never been suggested before. And why should we pay well over ten thousand dollars to Telstra to DO THEIR JOB!!! To provide the service that we are all paying for already! I might point out that this year's festival did not have as many visitors to town as in the past years, so it was not about numbers at all – it was a failure of the current Telstra service.

Not only were businesses all impacted, losing income (and some have received compensation from Telstra which seems to me an acknowledgment of this failure) but the safety implications of a whole town in a forest location in the middle of summer during a complete fire ban, having no reliable communications from Telstra, is absolutely reprehensible. Given we have never had such a failure in past years, with MORE visitors to the town, there is something very wrong with the service at this point in time.

The failure of Telstra to provide a service that we all pay for is long overdue for intervention. I have yet to have any relief or assistance from my personal attempts to have fees reduced or services improved, but far worse than that are the emergency implications of this failure.

I hope that your review will consider what I have written.

Sincerely

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