

G'day,

This morning I heard our former MP, Luke Hartsuyker, on ABC radio talking about the enquiry into telecommunications in country areas.

I make a submission to this enquiry, both in my private capacity as a resident/ business owner and I make it as President of the Glenugie RFS Brigade. Feel free to lodge it in separate sections if appropriate, but the issues are inextricably linked as often they are in the rural and remote area.

I have been in touch with our State MLA and Federal MP about the poor signal quality at our RFS station at 612 Big River Way, Glenugie and I realise that there are many priority areas to be balanced up in making a decision. Today though, I was reminded of an increase in risks to the community posed by, what appears to be, a new policy/practice adopted by Telstra.

Today there was an electricity outage for several hours in the area where I live at [REDACTED] Glenugie. This is fine in that Essential Energy warned us all in advance as they always do. The problem is that soon as the power went off so did the mobile signal. Many of us along this road abandoned the ancient Telstra copper landline service 3-4 years ago because it became extremely unreliable. Around that time we also found out that we would never have standard NBN access and we were all offered Satellite NBN, which many of us accepted. That way we would have internet and telephony by either satellite or by 3G/4G phone signals. We chose both and that seemed a sensible solution that worked reasonably well.....until the mobile towers went out when the power went out, leaving us with nothing!

This has happened before so it appears that there is no back up battery system on the local tower/s now. Previously, the mobile tower would be operational for some hours after power went out, presumably via a battery back up system, perhaps solar powered. I recall when I was living in Darwin that the mobile towers sometimes ran for well over 8 hours when the electricity was shut down in cyclones etc. Battery backup for the towers can be done and should be done.

I drove out of here this morning in search of a signal and there was none anywhere between here and beyond 4 Mile Lane intersection with Big River Way, including at our RFS Station which has a phone tower about 100m away. That tower was installed in recent years, but doesn't fix things – maybe it's owned and operated by one of the other telcos. There is another problem – can't they be forced to share this infrastructure? Our RFS brigade used some of the donated money that came to us after the 2019-2020 fires to install Wi-Fi phone signal boosters on our two fire trucks. That works nicely when there is a signal to boost....but it cannot boost what does not exist!

This latest situation is completely unacceptable. I run my small consultancy business from here at home and it becomes impossible to communicate when this happens. The lack of any communication option has potential implications for managing risks to our health and wellbeing as well.

Also, in my case it also compromises my ability to respond as a volunteer emergency service driver with the RFS. I am one of three active qualified drivers for our brigade's fire trucks and one of the other drivers also lives along this road and experiences exactly the same problems if not worse. If there is no driver, the brigade cannot respond! Even if and when we get to the station, we have no way of communicating with other members to coordinate the crews and trucks going to respond to the emergency. Imagine the impact this could have if we were dealing with a bushfire

emergency here or even just storm and flood situation. We need an urgent and permanent solution to these problems please.

I have attempted to contact Telstra about this today via their online messaging system but have received no answer to that, not even an acknowledgement. Last time we had extended outages and attempted to discuss and resolve these with Telstra we got absolutely nowhere. One of my neighbours, who also runs a small international business from home, took it to the Telecommunications Ombudsman but they refused to assist saying that they only helped "consumers", not businesses, whatever that means. This too needs fixing.

Thanks and kind regards,

Rick Murray, (Also President and Deputy Captain, Glenugie RFS Brigade)
Middle Star Tourism



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