Robert L. Cassidy

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7 August 2021

2021 Regional Telecommunications Review
Secretariat Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
GPO Box 594
Canberra, ACT 2601
secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

RE: Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee 2021

Dear Honourable Luke Hartsuyker and Committee Members:

Of the sixteen questions, I am not sure you are asking the correct questions, thus what answers could be offered that would make any real difference to the disadvantage and often unsafe condition that exists in rural Australia, particularly Tasmania, due to the lack of telephone and internet services.

Telecommunications in Tasmania is not much better than Papua New Guinea, at least between villages, they have conch shells, drums, and smoke signals to communicate important information. We do not even have that, in large parts of Tasmania.

Grants cycled between Telstra, Optus, Vodafone, and other offerings, means some bottom tier company can win that particular round of grants and install facilities that very few or none of the residents would use. For instance, there is a Vodafone tower at Tarraleah, Tasmania, yet only 17% of Australians subscribe. Telstra and Optus are the preferred service providers.

For Telstra to install a tower in rural Tasmania, Council would need to contribute on the order of $1 million. With approximately 2,500 Rate Payers across 8,000km^2, in the Central Highlands municipality, for example, many would not have telephone or internet facility. With nearly 14,500kms in Tasmania, one can drive many, many kilometres between mobile phone signals. Thus, Tasmania has many telecommunications "blackspots", nearly twelve years after I relocated to Tasmania, with no improvement in sight.

During past bushfires, residents wanting information or needing to know the safest escape route or shelter were out of luck. If a person gets bitten by a brown snake, a funnel-web spider or jackjumper, has their life threatened by some drunken redneck, or comes across a vehicle wrapped around a tree;

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that lack of overlapping telephone-signal umbrella and internet results in a delay communicating a life threatening situation to Emergency Services. This lack of telecommunications facility and convenience disadvantages Tasmanians and tourists to our State. I came across a Frenchman and his girlfriend in their SUV parked with its hazard flashers blinking, in one of Tasmania's telecommunications blackspots. He assumed he had sufficient petrol to make it to his destination or the next petrol station merely 14 km further along. Fortunately, I had a spare 5L can of petrol to get them on their way. Had I not come along, how long would they have waited and hoped?

The Federal and State governments must invest in telecommunications infrastructure and not count on some backwater Council to fund it. It will never get done.

The aforementioned should address Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Regarding Question 6, how shortsighted and dumb is government? AND, this is not a Liberal or Labor point-scoring issue. It is a government issue.

Did **ANYONE** in government take a survey of all Australians to determine how many own or have access to #1 a mobile phone, #2 the most up-to-date and state-of-the-art mobile device, #3 how many have technology older than an iPhone 4, like me? Why wouldn't the Australian Bureau of Statistics include these questions in their Census?

Then the government wrings its hands and laments the slow uptake of the COVID Tracing App. Duh!

What would you expect?!

When the COVID Tracing App first was announced as being available, I was probably one of the first to attempt to download it and discovered it was not compatible with Apple iOS 7.1.2 (11D257). Immediately, I alerted the Health Minister and the Department of Health, but received some unimpressive reply.

Then they geniuses had another thought bubble . . . QR Code, and then mandate that all businesses adopt it, using ambiguous language that would discriminate against anyone without a mobile phone or owns a mobile phone that is incompatible, due to obsolescence. So, many business did not provide for a manual check method and believed they did not have to. Just dumb!

Regarding Question 7, it should not just relate to Aboriginal communities. There are many rural, regional, and remote inhabitants who do not have telecommunications access, because the infrastructure is absent or they cannot afford it.That situation exists in Tasmania, including Aborigines.

I switched from Telstra after 15 years due to poor customer service, numerous outages, static noise interference, and Technical Support personnel located in

the Philippines who patently had nil technical competence, thus, no support. I switched telecommunications services providers to M2 Commander, who sold me on saving $500 per year over Telstra and they are located downtown Hobart, "Come in for a chat anytime." That lasted as long as a fart in the "roaring forties", that Tasmania is known for. Due to my rural location, I was told I could keep ADSL 2+, but Commander insisted that my ADSL 2+ would be disconnected and I needed to switch to NBN. After I switched to NBN, I LOST service, functionality and convenience that I have known for 66 years or when I first learned how to use a telephone. For example, I cannot use the phone in the bedroom or lounge room as an Extension to the one my wife answers in the kitchen. The only way to achieve that is to SUBSCRIBE, that is pay extra to have additional phone lines for each phone I have in my house.

Who designed that system? M2 Commander is as bad as Telstra was. Their Technical Support is also located in the Philippines and they read from the same script that Telstra Tech Support does.

I cannot answer Questions 8 and 9, except to keep the Communist Chinese away from investing in Australia's telecommunications infrastructure.

Regarding Question 10, funding is always the #1 barrier.

Regarding Questions 11 and 12, please revisit my previous advice, "The Federal and State governments must invest in telecommunications infrastructure and not count on some backwater Council to fund it. It will never get done."

Regarding Question 13, if you want to lay it on Councils, then offer significant Interest Free Loans or Grants. It will require $1 million per tower.

Regarding Question 14, even appealing to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman has proved UNHELPFUL. They cop a snotty attitude. So, there is no help, no support, and often no choice but to put up with poor service and pay your bill.

Regarding Question 15, Customers often do not know what they don't know. For example, I used an old-school clamshell Motorola V60 all over the world, including PNG, when I was with Telstra. When I switched providers to M2 Commander, and it took effect, when I was overseas, my wife could not use her phone and I could not call her. The reason for that was that M2 Commander uses the same frequencies as Optus, for its 3G network and I was forced to buy two new mobile phones that were compatible (iPhone 4). That promised $500 savings that M2 Commander promised over Telstra flew out the window like a panicked sparrow. But, I did not know that Commander used different frequencies and I was not told so, by the Sales Representative. Thus, I don't know what I don't know. That suggests that the telecommunications companies personnel MUST BE better trained, more forthcoming with information, and above all HONEST. They are not!

Australian Network Frequencies

	2G	3G	4G	5G
Telstra	N/A	850MHz (B5)	700MHz (B28) 900MHz (B8) 1800MHz (B3) 2100MHz (B1) 2600MHz (B7)	850MHz (n5) 3500MHZ (n78)
Optus	N/A	900MHz (B8) 2100MHz (B1)*	700MHz (B28) 1800MHz (B3) 2100MHz (B1) 2300MHz (B40) 2600MHz (B7)	2300MHz (n40) 3500MHz (n78)
Vodafone	N/A	900MHz (B8)	850MHz (B5) 1800MHz (B3) 2100MHz (B1)	700MHz (n28) 3500MHz (n78)

Regarding Question 16, I must reiterate, for national security reasons, Australia must prevent Communist China from gaining anymore ground in weaving itself into our vital infrastructure.

Questions:
1.What telecommunications services are required in regional Australia to meet current and future needs? Are there any things regional communities and businesses need to do, but can't, on their existing services?

2.What changes in demand, barriers or challenges need to be addressed when it comes to telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia?
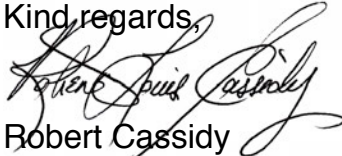
3.How have the Government's policies and programs affected telecommunications service outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia? How can these be improved?

4.How do service reliability issues impact on regional communities and businesses? How do outages, including in natural disasters, impact on communities and businesses?

5.How might such impacts be addressed to ensure greater reliability? How can the network resilience be addressed in regional areas?

6.How did the use of digital services change for regional consumers and businesses during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? What insights for future service delivery does this provide?

7.What can be done to improve the access and affordability of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities?

8.How can investment in telecommunications infrastructure work with other programs and policies to encourage economic development in regional Australia?

9.What role could innovation, including new models, alternative investors or new ways of doing business, play to encourage investment in regional telecommunications infrastructure? What are the barriers?

10.To what extent will new technologies enable significant change to the delivery of telecommunications services in regional Australia over the next 5-10 years? Are there any barriers to accessing these technologies?

11.How can Government better support the rapid rollout of and investment in new telecommunications solutions in regional areas?

12.How can different levels of Government, the telecommunications industry and regional communities better co-ordinate their efforts to improve telecommunications in regional Australia?

13.What changes to Government investment programs are required to ensure they continue to be effective in delivering improved telecommunications?

14.How can regional consumers be better supported to identify, choose and use the best connectivity options for their circumstances, as well as to understand and use their consumer rights?

15.To what extent is public information on connectivity options, including predictive coverage data and speeds, sufficient to help regional customers make informed decisions? What other information is needed?

16.What other matters should the Committee consider in its review and why are they important?

Kind regards,

Robert Cassidy