

Submission to Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee

I am a primary producer living and working on my property in the Berremangra locality of the Hilltops LGA New South Wales.

My submission relates to a specific problem which falls under the Service Reliability issue and although I can only describe the problem as it affects Berremangra, I think it more than probable that the problem is general.

The problem is: when the electricity supply from the grid is disrupted by a planned or unplanned outage the Telstra fixed line and the Telstra mobile service cease almost immediately. This is because the mobile tower transmitter is connected to the exchange by co-axial cable and draws on the back-up battery. Because the mobile transmitter requires much more power than the copper wire network the back-up is quickly drained.

The issue is: when there is an emergency affecting the electricity supply e.g. storm damage to lines, in the absence of any Telstra telephone service - mobile or fixed line - there is no way to report this to the electricity supplier. This is of particular concern where the emergency is related to bushfire conditions or to a motor vehicle accident on the nearby Hume Highway.

To my knowledge there is no plan for Telstra to provide a back-up power system for these small regional transmitting towers, for example by solar power.

Although it may be outside the committee's Terms of Reference I wish to place on record my so far unsuccessful attempts to communicate the above issue to Telstra.

My attempt to contact Telstra directly was rejected on the grounds that it was not a complaint about a CURRENT service outage on a Telstra account. When my telecommunications retail provider, Southern Phone, contacted Telstra they received the same response. A member of staff of my Federal member of parliament, Michael McCormack, was rebuffed by Telstra in the same manner. Mr McCormack has since written to the Minister responsible for regional affairs but, as of today's date has not received a reply. I lodged a complaint with the Telecommunications Ombudsman which was rejected on the grounds that it did not relate to a dispute about a Telstra account. My objection to that decision by the Ombudsman was ignored. My impression is the refusals to respond by Telstra and the Ombudsman have been generated by computer algorithms and that no one has actually read my communications. In contrast, my interactions with Telstra technical staff in the field over 50 years have always been friendly and helpful.

I believe these two issues could affect a significant number of rural and regional telecommunications users and I hope in particular that the Committee might consider a recommendation for urgent attention to the back-up power problem in its report.

Please contact me by phone or email if any further information is required. My submission may be made public.

Kevin Rattigan

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