

Copy of the letter sent to our federal rep. Mr Dan Tehan. He has suggested I forward this to the RTIRC

Edith Coombe

Wickliffe, Victoria, 3379

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Dear Mr Tehan,

In reply to your email regarding the state of Telecommunications in my area, yes, I have contacted your office about this issue before.

I am getting old and had 2 items left on my bucket list – to meet the aliens when they arrive on Earth from outer space, and to have proper broadband and mobile coverage in Wickliffe. Since I last contacted you, my money is still on the aliens arriving first!

A brief summary of our experiences of telecommunications in Wickliffe:

- We moved to Wickliffe in December of 2002 and had been warned that we would need a mobile phone which used the CDMA system because of poor coverage.
- That worked reasonably well, until our phone broke down and we were told it could not be fixed or replaced because CDMA was going to be shut down.
- We had to buy a “next G” phone and it never worked at Wickliffe. I spent a whole year paying \$30 per month for something that did not work, and Telstra would not let me out of the contract. They promised it would work once CDMA was turned off.
- Well it didn't! We had several visits from reps and technicians, they tried out various types of mobile phones and nothing helped. Their best suggestion was that we could get a Yagi antenna and plug the mobile into it – but I pointed out that it was then no longer a MOBILE phone.
- Telstra put Wickliffe in the too hard basket, and Telstra has never worked in Wickliffe.
- We changed to Optus. It works better but still very unreliable; we can get text messages but voice calls usually do not even come through or drop out during the call.
- We live in the centre of the main street of Wickliffe, and have had many experiences of stranded travellers, broken down and unable to phone for help. Any tradesmen who come to our place find it a great handicap that they cannot use their smartphone. Even the recent Census official on Commonwealth Government business delivering our forms, could not get a Telstra signal to officially identify our property.
- We still have one public phone booth in our main street, and it is still obviously necessary.

- My husband is extremely disabled and non-verbal. He has a Vital Call alarm system, and usually these systems are connected to the Telstra mobile network. Of course, that would not work here so they had to connect him via our landline, which is not as good and also has a detrimental effect on our landline phone.
- Broadband. Initially when we arrived in 2002 we were using dial-up. When I wanted to upgrade to broadband I did need to use a Yagi antenna. I have been using an Optus mobile external modem for several years, but it was very limited, very expensive and very unreliable. Like the mobile phone, it seemed to be affected by the weather and I often had no coverage for days at a time.
- I actually ended up having to close down my own personal website because of the expense and lack of reliability of the mobile broadband service.
- I finally got satellite broadband via the Sky muster. I am generally quite satisfied with this service. However, it is still a pretty poor option compared with services and prices available for people in the city or suburbs. We do not have the option of “unlimited” service. If we want to use Netflix or other streaming programs, this very quickly gobbles up our monthly gigabyte allowance.

Wickliffe is not all that isolated or out of the way. We are sitting on one of our main interstate Highways! Eleven km away at Lake Bolac they have perfect mobile coverage.

Telstra says that our problem is topographical. We are in a hollow created by a bend in the Hopkins River. They say the “waves” that carry the mobile signal cannot dip down far enough to reach us in the middle of Wickliffe. (Optus does reach us though; within some limitations.) Optus has been upgrading the towers at Lake Bolac. In the 19 years that we have been here the Telstra service has never improved.

We get very worried every time we hear that landline phones may become obsolete.

We also get annoyed when we hear about all the upgrades and improvements and 5G and all the other hi-tech things that have been developed (for city dwellers) yet they still cannot supply even the basic services to us country folk!

We are aware that Wickliffe is not alone in its lack of tech services. There are many small towns in the Western district that have the same lack of services.

It seems ironic that the beautiful Western District – the historical “Australia Felix” and one of the earliest settlements of Western civilisation in Australia – has not been “fortunate” enough to be kept up to date with all the necessary modern technical developments.

Edith Coombe.

