I am a resident and a CFA volunteer in the Little Yarra Valley area. Which basically encompasses Gladysdale to Powelltown and the surrounding areas of the valley.

I would like to put forward an issue we've been having in the Upper Yarra Valley for years. Which is Loss of Mobile Phone coverage on average within 3 hours of a power outage. . Without power no one can use computers to check the Emergency Vic web site, so they have to fall back on the Mobile phone network which also stops. As most people now rely on their Mobile phone for Phone and Data communications. Most of the time if people still have a fixed land line they can call out but this also failed for about 4 days during the recent severe storms. So we had no communications at all in an Emergency situation.

This poses a severe safety risk it the residents of the Little Yarra Valley

 Without Mobile service no one can phone for help unless they have a fixed land line (and its working).

Without Mobile service no one can use their phones to check the Emergency Vic app for updates.

Without Mobile service the emergency services cannot get Emergency warnings to residents in the area.

Without Mobile coverage the simulated evacuation program that was undertaken a few years ago is useless because no one will get the evacuation warning.

THIS WILL COST LIVES. And something needs to be done.

I have called Telstra numerous times to complain and all I get is sorry, they just don't seem to care.

In a recent conversation I again complained (and During the conversation with the Telstra Representative I was told " Telstra would not upgrade the power back up as it was not responsible for upgrading the Phone Tower power back up and it was the job of The Australian Government" I asked for this to be sent to via Email, This was agreed by your rep. This did not happen and after numerous E-mails asking for such. Nothing has happened and Telstra are now ignoring ALL my complaints.

I contacted them again (   ) all I got was a copy of the previous case saying it was closed as an unsatisfied customer report, When I asked again for a written copy of the conversation from the previous conversation I was told it was closed and that was it. The customer report also said they could not find an active mobile service outage (no wonder it was over 2 weeks later)

For the communities along the Little Yarra Valley, from Gladysdale to Powelltown there is really only one safe way out and that is North west through Yarra Junction and it is a tree lined single carriageway. To try and go South East would in my mind be very unsafe as one has to negotiate a heavily treed winding mountain road that only leads further into the bush towards Noojee, so the potential to get trapped is very high. For this reason early warning about an incident is crucial to saving lives.

My main concern is the Governments or Telstra's lack of action on upgrading the power supply on Mt Beenak Tower, An auto start Generator would be an obvious choice but that probably cost's too much, what price a life. I did hear that someone was told it was "not financially viable" to put in a Generator, what price a life. I don't doubt we are not the only community in this situation.

Governments have a good history of shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. Have you noticed that after a large natural disaster like a bushfire the affected communities get a nice new fire station and infrastructure it might have helped a lot if they had it before? We'll most likely have to wait until a disaster to get anything done. But that won't help the residents now.

On 07-09-2021 The Hon Paul Fletcher released a paper titled "Extending Battery Backup for Regional & Remote Areas" Stating that the Government had provided the phone companies with $13.2 Million to extend Mobile tower battery back up to at least 12 hours.

We are Zoned Rural and while we are not classified as Regional or Remote we should at least have the same minimum or better. During the Covid Lock downs we are actually treated as Metro but not for Mobile Phone service. Can you imagine the stink if during a power outage in any inner Metro Melbourne suburb the mobile phone service went out? But we just have to put up with it.

Regards Martin Dartnall

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