The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your enquiry.

We have a residence at Wallagoot less than 9km in a straight line from Tathra on the south coast of NSW. Connection to the internet is made via a mobile broadband device purchased from Telstra because Telstra no longer provides ADSL services to their existing landlines in that particular location.

Telstra's shop in Bega has advised that their standard internet service will for the foreseeable future be provided through Skymuster which we were given to understand is a satellite service contracted primarily for remote areas (friends in other areas using it find it slow). Our area is hardly remote and landline phone services are still available. The implications from this ludicrous situation suggest that we would be using up internet capacity which should actually be allocated for genuinely remote customers.

Alternatively we have taken the mobile broadband option referred to above. This has proven to be poor. The service alternates between almost completely useless during the day and quite good between 1am and 5am, i.e. when we don't need it. Telstra's coverage map indicates that our location is close to its boundary which may partially explain the poor service, however since it is good only when most people are not using it, logic would suggest that its capacity to handle the volume of traffic during the day is the more likely problem.

Telstra has also advised that much more expensive options involving dishes and or boosters etc are also available should we be willing to pay for them. Costs vary between several hundreds of dollars to a couple of thousand without any guarantee of major improvement, at least without the need for additional testing. We do not stream movies or participate in high speed gaming etc, generally relying on it for news and communications only.

Altogether (Skymuster or not) what we have is a farcical service which although provided by Australia's major telco and ten minutes from the town centres of Bega and Merimbula, compares unfavourably with similar offerings in the 3rd world. Under these circumstances the universal services guarantee USG is a sham.

I have read the Issues Paper, however not being an expert I see little point in attempting to respond to individual issues with uninformed suggestions. Although I have many, my issue is more than anything with a description of "remote" or even regional (whatever that means). To suggest that anywhere on the east coast of NSW that has (or previously had) a hard wired phone connection as remote is an insult to one's intelligence. It seems more likely that "commercially unviable" is the more apt description.

But what might that have to do with it? One would reasonably presume that it wasn't commercially viable to supply a phone service in the first place, so why might it be an issue now? My suggestion is that basic utilities like phones were never intended to be commercially viable and that (within limits) those whose services are cheaply provided should subsidise those whose services are not. It's called equity I believe. It is clear that in order to dispense more equitable services the limits to viability need to be adjusted away from users whose providers extract the most profit.

In a similar context, I wonder how users in truly remote areas feel when or where critical access to reasonable communications is being overwhelmed by users streaming games and playing with bitcoin and the like, from areas which are not remote were it not for the possibility that they may be commercial unviable. If allowed to occur, this is simply not right.

A review is all very well, but in my view the committee should recommend starting again by removing a disingenuous attitude to what is considered remote. The woeful recent history of telecommunications in this country needs a better direction.

Thank you again

Rex Pepper