

Regional Telecommunications Review 2021

An individual response to some Key Issues

Connectivity ie high speed reliable and resilient broadband mobile networks in regional areas to support public safety, day-to-day business, social contact and access to essential services like health and education.

In 1998 when I moved to [REDACTED], Moss Vale, NSW there was only a Telstra landline which suffered from many outages varying in length from days to weeks. In 2005 an Optus satellite dish was installed for internet access because our address was considered remote. In August 2018 Optus withdrew from the satellite market and the NBN was connected to the house in September.

In October 2018 I joined up with Southern Phone and their Sky Muster Program for internet but kept the Telstra landline despite its issues because mobile coverage was so unreliable. However the ageing copper line deteriorated to the point that the caller and the called could barely hear each other above the noise on the line. In May 2019 Telstra was instructed to disconnect the useless line to the house.

This left me with the mobile phone and Telstra WiFi. Internet service continues to be provided by Southern Phone. It is not always reliable. I have now progressed from not being able to hear people speak on a landline to having to drive 4 kilometres up the road to get anywhere near normal phone reception on my mobile. I am not the only resident of Meryla Road who has to get in a car and drive to a location where they can communicate (without the mobile failing) with family, friends, and the rest of the world, pay bills, keep doctor's appointments, receive sms messages (this is particularly important when there are emergencies such as bushfires) and telephone those people who have been unable to contact them at home because there is no mobile reception there. Trying to run any sort of business from home would be impossible.

Adequacy and Changing Demand

While mobile devices continue to be mainly used for sending messages and making calls, more data-intensive uses like navigation, emails, social media are becoming more common. However, rates of usage for these purposes are significantly lower outside of the major cities.

The reason that the rates of usage for any purpose are significantly lower outside of the major cities is because many of us who live outside of the major cities have no mobile reception where we need it most, that is at home.

If mobile services are available to 99.5% of Australia's population then it would seem that numbers of areas in the NSW Southern Highlands are in the 0.5% to whom these services are not adequately available. The bigger picture is that the region is developing rapidly and COVID-19 has accelerated the communication infrastructure demands as more people seek to live outside of the big cities.

There are many promises and advertisements in the various media showing how wonderful Australia's communication networks are. I have sought advice on what to do next and been told that the Australian Government has no real hard and fast plans to bring us up to world standards and that Eion Musk and his Starlink program are my best hope. Like all other Australians I would rather see Australian initiatives, expertise and resources take us successfully into the future.

I hope that the Regional Telecommunications Review 2021 will accomplish that.

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