

Regional Telecommunications Review 2021 – 30 /9/21

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[REDACTED] This submission can be made public.

Modanville is, for rating purposes only, a designated village in the Lismore LGA. It is 14 kms from the city and about 25kms from the coast, as the crow flies. In reality it is a locality defined by the Dunoon Road, the residents of which live mainly on small farm holdings and also includes 3 subdivisions in close proximity to each other, lead off it, namely Funnel Park, Modanville East and Modanville Heights. The subdivisions consist of houses on $\frac{3}{4}$ acre to $1\frac{1}{2}$ acre blocks. The population is less than 1000. Its amenities include a small shop, weekly refuse collections and a public school.

Until January 2021, the internet service to my home comprised ADSL, with speeds of around 6.7Mbps, but in August 2020, my husband and I noticed that our speeds, particularly in the evening, had been dropping gradually to between 0.7 to 3. Although we are “empty nesters”, we each have a laptop, tablet, mobile phone and smart televisions which we use to stream TV and movies. We also have 3 pieces of exercise equipment with online membership to a fitness club, from which we stream training videos. Our ADSL speeds were therefore impacting on our ability to satisfactorily use our devices and consequently our quality of life.

I complained to Telstra, which is our Internet provider and was advised that we should change to mobile Broadband, as we were well within 4G boundaries. However, during a subsequent conversation with my neighbour opposite, I discovered that he had had NBN Fixed Wireless for about 2 years. I subsequently searched the NBN website, only to find that my address, being on the odd numbered side of Funnell Drive, only had access to NBN Satellite, despite the service to the entire even side of the road being Fixed Wireless.

Another telephone call to Telstra confirmed the results of my search and I was told that if we chose to change to NBN Satellite, then we would need to find a new provider. After much consideration, we opted for Mobile Broadband in January 2021. From day 1, the speeds were significantly worse than ADSL. For a couple of hours on a sunny windless day, we could (with a \$600 modem), achieve speeds of around 3Mbps, but during the evening, the system struggled to provide us with anything greater than 0.1Mbps. Speeds of 0.07 to 0.02Mbps, were common after 4pm, which meant that on many days we could not even access emails.

I again contacted Telstra and after much investigation by them I was told (after about 5 months), that our signal was only bouncing off 1 tower rather than the normal 2. Whilst it was coming from Dunoon School, which is only 4kms away, the signal was having to travel across a number of blackspots to reach us. Telstra also confirmed that there were no plans to improve the signal or to fix the blackspots. I therefore decided to return to ADSL, because I did not consider that NBN Satellite would be able to provide me with a reliable service, given that the area is hilly and heavily vegetated.

I searched the NBN website to find out which areas of Modanville had access to Fixed Wireless and ascertained that those homes in Funnell Drive, which had even numbers were the only ones with such access. I also discovered that a structure situated in Modanville on the Dunoon Road, at the entrance to 2 of the 3 subdivisions, that I pass every day, was indeed an NBN tower! This tower is about 500 metres from my home, as the crow flies!

I therefore contacted my Federal MP Kevin Hogan requesting that all the residents of Modanville be given access to the best NBN technology that was available in the area. He took up the case and contacted the NBN. Its first response was to justify why only one side of one road in the locality had Fixed Wireless, including demographics and topography of the area. I persisted by pointing out that whilst my neighbour opposite was on the higher side of the road, Funnell Drive dips sharply and the even side of the road then becomes lower than the odd side. In conclusion, the nature of the service available is purely dependent on house number. In addition, I also pointed out that one of NBN's KPIs was to ensure a seamless transition for customers to NBN, which included being able to keep the current provider, which was not possible with Satellite.

Mr. Hogan provided my response to the NBN. A few weeks later, an NBN technician from Coffs Harbour arrived. He checked the signal and was somewhat perplexed by the results. He had been told that our signal kept falling out, but could not understand how this could be the case, because from his results, the signal was very strong. He was even more confused when we told him that we don't have NBN Fixed Wireless and have thus far been considered ineligible for it. He was confident that he would be able to rectify the situation and was surprised that the whole area did not already have access to this technology.

After that, we heard nothing more from anyone, but continued to check the NBN website. About a week later, our eligibility on the NBN website changed and I was then able to contact Telstra to have NBN Fixed Wireless installed. Some 3 months on, our speeds are around 60Mbps during the day and at night, between 10 and 20. Although these are not ground-breaking compared to the optic fibre services that are enjoyed by Lismore and Ballina residents, we are very happy with them, because we can now stream movies and travel to far away places on our exercise equipment, without the constant buffering that plagued us for such a long time.

By way of update, the Modanville East and Heights subdivisions now have access to Fixed Wireless, but the residents of Funnell Drive, who live on the odd numbered side of the road continue to be limited to Satellite. This issue does impact our lives in this COVID world, where we are seeing changes to how people live and work. My next door neighbour who recently moved into the area, advised me that during our last lockdown, he had to continue working in the office, because he could not work from home, due to poor internet speeds. I suggested that he write to Mr. Hogan.

Having moved from Sydney to the Far North Coast of NSW in 1990, I have become used to services being inferior to those I enjoyed as a city dweller. I appreciate that the Government has sought to improve services in regional areas, but companies like NBN have taken the easy option by putting better resources into the larger regional centres, whilst ignoring

satellite communities such as mine, despite their prevalence along the coastal strip.

There is absolutely no reason why my neighbour cannot be part of the 21st century and have decent Internet access, but there appear to be no plans for this to occur, despite the fact that we have a tower just metres away. Sadly, like me, it will be necessary for him to lobby his MP and justify a service that millions take for granted. Perhaps, as a result of reviews such as this, NBN will be called to account for why they are spending money improving the speeds of customers with over 100Mbps, ahead of other members of the community who are languishing in internet deserts with speeds of less than 1 Mbps.

In terms of mobile coverage, both my husband and I have Vodaphone phones. Their signal is 3G inside the house and 4G outside. My phone usage no longer drops out when it is connected via wireless, but on its own, the service is woeful at best and non-existent at least.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell my story of having to fight to obtain an essential service, which I would be taking for granted if I was living within a city's limits!