

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

Name of respondent: Llyod Smith

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Date: 27th February 2014

Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? **No**

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
27th February 2014

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2454
CANBERRA ACT 2615

Dear Sir,

Firstly I need to offer my thanks to the Department of Communications for the opportunity for all Australians, city, rural, remote or outback to make submissions on this critical communications issue. Initiated by the Hon Malcolm Turnbull as an election commitment and well supported by our Federal member Mr Peter Hendy, thank you both. Perhaps we now have a voice especially from the bush. I live adjacent to the Hamlet of Numeralla at [REDACTED] as a lifestyle block where I also conduct my small business specialising in Environmental Engineering. Good communications are essential in these areas, we are rural, not remote or outback and when compared with the cities, the rollout of modern communications is just not happening. We can barely receive any of the ABC suite of radio transmissions, AM or FM, digital television in the Hamlet is good though lacking SBS (I understand it will come on line in March), poor internet for many with some properties still on dial up, but above all east of Cooma only 22km away and 98 km from Australian Parliament House, we have no mobile telephone service at all. The lack of this essential service, given it is 2014, affects all residents in this area as well as many regional Australians. It relates to essential communications, running a small business, safety for primary producers and contractors, the travelling public and above all personal safety in regard emergency such as rural/farm accidents, misadventure with domestic recreation and tourism, floods, snowfall and above all bush fire as well evidenced in the 2013 Yarabeen bush fire. Some might call it "tough love" as we choose to live in the bush but with Australia still having around 40% plus of its population living in rural areas, we need state of the art modern day communications. I work overseas a lot in SE Asia and The Pacific Islands Community, the roll out of mobile telephone services by non Government telco's, mostly based on a model of voice and text and not multi-media is indeed quite stunning, Australia must be humbled by what is being achieved off shore and I will cover this later. Australia seems to be on a growth model to have a 60% increase in its population to something like 50 million people by 2050 or so, an increase in infrastructure and primary production is mandatory, and required quite rapidly. Where is this primary production going to occur, cities ? no. It will happen in rural, remote and outback areas and modern communication infrastructure would appear fundamental to facilitating this. I really need to ask, who is asleep at the wheel ? as outside the cities, little appears to be happening for communication rollout. Is the totally privatised Telstra going to achieve this, NBN Co or It is great that \$100 million is being allocated for this, with the NBN (Labor) budget at something close to \$40 billion, why not 10% of this allocated to regional communications such as mobile. The Hon Turnbull is sensibly downsizing this but why not \$1 billion for regional communications? \$100 million is a paltry sum for the entire regional Australia, that's \$14 million per state (or in very real terms around 20 Sydney houses) excluding the ACT which does not appear to have a problem. It will be eaten up on planning and administration costs with nothing left for infrastructure and implementation.

As this is a discussion paper, I raise many issues with respect to a regional improvement in the non service as follows, in dot point format;

- **National Emergency Mobile Communications Supplier** - I cannot get an answer on this one, politicians avoid answering it like the plague. Surely it was Telstra when it was Government owned, but how can a privately owned Telco now be mandated as such. I would like an answer on this and be referred to the legislation; I see nothing in the Telstra Sale Act.
- **Regional Emergency floods, drought, fire, snowfall** – it goes without saying the role of mobile communications here. We all again learnt as residents in the Yarabeen fires of 2013 the role of mobile communications and the National Emergency radio broadcaster, both nonexistent 10 km east of Cooma. All emergency services are well aware of this serious issue and no doubt have made their individual responses supporting improvement.
- **Rural workers** – perhaps one of the most unrealised/unrecognised emergency situations is the risk to rural workers, this extends to farmers, sole traders, contractors, consultants and the like. As you know, business in the bush is currently very tough and for many such as myself, to have a satellite phone service would be a luxury, they are expensive. At best for many, when you leave the house in the morning the wife or a neighbour might be briefed, “call emergency services if I’m not back by 6pm” yes, this is the reality in the bush even in 2014. The analogue service did provide a level of security here, but the Government at the time was conned by the Telco’s in that the replacement service would be considerably better. No, as it is all about maximising the city traffic, up loads/downloads, apps, and a multitude of mobile and web based media services that I do not understand. Why was this allowed to happen or was it, “this is the medicine you must have, it will be better for you”. We well know rural misadventure and accidents are very significant, tractor and quad bike accidents, chainsaws, stock induced injuries, other plant machinery, personal health events etc. Rural people are sensible and most practise a level of OHS but one needs to work and naturally risks are taken especially when working alone. Risks unallowable for Government workers who cannot work alone and if so, have robust OH&S training, work/safety action plans, satellite phones, EPIRBS etc, are regularly faced by rural workers. Visibility of these issues for primary producers and supporting contractors in the bush needs a lot more recognition by Governments and a significant improvement in regional communications will only help.
- **Accidents** – one of the real risks in this area is auto accidents, not necessarily due to misadventure. We have extremely poorly maintained rural roads and the main road to Numeralla and Countegany is a very narrow sealed two way carriageway. With 600 vehicles per day and only increasing especially in holiday periods and more commuters, with 10% being bulk carriers, logging trucks, stock trucks and trucks frequently carrying heavy plant, with the pot holes and severe edge break and essentially no maintenance by Cooma Monaro Shire Council, there will be a severe accident one day. We now have two 40 seat School Buses each day (twice) travelling through Numeralla. Many residents including myself have been forced into the edge break/shoulder by such vehicles. The recent wet years have significantly increased the local kangaroo population, personally I have hit/clipped some at night time despite speed precautions, again there will be a serious accident and again, with no means of alerting emergency services especially if late at night.
- **Paramedics** – we well know the role of paramedics especially in attending accident events in the bush. They too are compromised by lack of mobile coverage, assistance in diagnosis, treatment and coordination of services. Only 2 nights ago, an ambulance passed through Numeralla at 1:30am, lights and sirens activated, presumably to an accident. I learnt the next day, it was a serious automobile accident in the bush on Peak View Road, the single occupant/victim sustained very serious injuries and Snowy South Care (Regional rescue

helicopter) airlifted him to Canberra Hospital some hours later. Accidents such as this are not uncommon in this area. I wonder if mobile communications played a role there, in that perhaps the accident occurred some hours earlier but it could not be reported and emergency service were only alerted some hours later possibly by a late motorist ?. Again, last year Snowy South Care parked up on the Numeralla Oval for at least 2 hours awaiting an accident site out at Kybean to be better located, the need for someone to drive from the accident site to “get reception” delayed the recovery/assessment significantly.

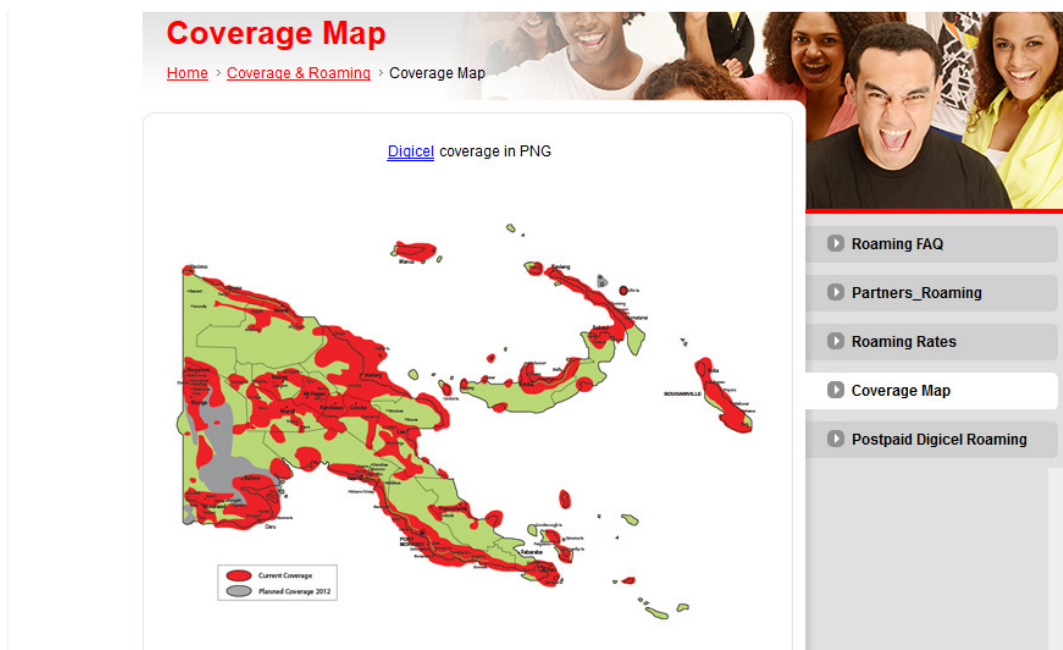
- **Old persons** – by choice, many older rural people choose to retire in the bush and sustain their preferred lifestyle. Whilst their health may be generally good, there are always some concerns especially if there is a medical condition of some sort. The lack of mobile coverage for safety if travelling or working on the block is of concern to many. Likewise I understand that medical alert bracelets and the like (well advertised in the media) are mobile phone based and are of no value in the bush. It is indeed very sad when our healthy and independent older Australians are forced by sensibility to move into town because of poor communications and not so much lifestyle issues.
- **Small Business** – I operate a small business from the bush. With no mobile communications and the associated applications etc, it makes it somewhat difficult. It is common now for many Government and NGO agencies to call on a mobile number with disregard to land lines for rural people, hence many calls cannot get through or are deferred to a message bank. There is an assumption by many agencies and city people that everyone in Australia has mobile access. Commonly when I come to town there can be several important messages from some days ago. In these areas, many town based contractors operate in the bush, again for communication with family, workers, consultants, they have no service for essential contact.
- **Recreation** – the recreation activities east of Cooma are immense and this is well evidenced by the traffic in the weekends. With several National and State Forest Parks acting as a draw card the activities are extremely diverse from passive forest activities to horse riding and remote motorcycling. Additional to this are caving, canyoning, 4 wheel driving, fishing, orienteering, motorcycle rally's, firewood collection (significant) and just plain old bush experience of camping by a river, campfire, BBQ, swimming, fishing and a few beers. Should there be accidents which there are, bushfire or family trauma and a real risk of snake bite, there is no way to communicate, compounded with a vehicle breakdown, there is no way out.
- **Developing countries**

You may well question why this is relevant. Indeed it is of significant relevance. I work overseas in Asia Pacific frequently on donor and commercial project work. The roll out of mobile communication is indeed quite stunning in small impoverished developing countries. The roll out and coverage especially in rural and remote areas is thus quite surprising, this should be very humbling to Australia, for example.

Lao PDR – 2013 I was engaged on Hydro Electric work (2 visits) in the Mouang Samouy area in Southern Laos, close to the Vietnam border, an area of low population, poverty and poor infrastructure. There are two mobile Telco's providing fantastic coverage with many cell towers, this is expanding at a rapid rate throughout rural Laos.

Sarawak (Malaysia - Borneo) – again working there 2013, and in remote areas close to the Kalimantan (Indonesian) border in inner Borneo, there are two mobile phone Telco's installing mobile phone infrastructure, again remote areas with low populations.

Papua New Guinea – Digicel cover 40% of PNG, true and increasing. This is an impoverished developing country, highly mountainous with very dispersed populations. Digicel is a private Telco, they don't do it for love, their model is mostly based on voice and text, and they have a business model that means they make profits. They are only one of PNG's several Telco's. Look at Bougainville, close to 100% coverage !! I was working on Bougainville early 2013, natives are running around in the Jungle with mobile telephones. Look at Manus Island, topical as it is currently with the migration centre, close to 100% coverage !



Fiji – I lived in Fiji 2007 – 2010, Digicel and Vodafone are giving fantastic coverage over both main islands and covering many outer islands, this includes many rural and mountainous areas in the interior.

Vanuatu - I am returning there again shortly for project work, Efate is well covered by Digicel. Espiritu Santo, around Lugainville and out in the Jungle, tribal people are walking around with mobile phones with expanding networks.

So, what is going on Australia, we install one tower and it is a big event, consider yourselves lucky (eg Nimmitabel cell tower 2010 or so) With respect to the expansive services being installed in SE Asia/Pacific (and I have worked in 14 Pacific Island Nations) Australia is a very definite third world country when it comes to the roll out of rural cell phone coverage !

- **Earlier technologies, Analogue, CDMA** – by all accounts, the analogue mobile phone system was very good for rural and even areas but it was phased out for a newer superior service. We were then promised that CDMA was the new service which would be superior, no it was not. We were then again promised that the Next G service would be better still, no it is not. All rural people well know the locations (small red spots and many times only a few metres

long) where we used to get service on analogue or CDMA, not possible on Next G. Understandably, yes there is resentment from the bush against the Telco's and Government in that our rural communications have been seriously degraded by newer supposedly "superior" technologies. Is this not all about cities and multi-media and the bush does not count? I need convincing on this and why would Telstra shareholders/Chairman and the Board need to care about the bush anyway?

- **The role of regional telephone exchanges** – in rural areas, these are the single most important piece of infrastructure providing the communication hub for existing services, all owned, managed and maintained by Telstra. For the latter, it is located at my gateway in Numeralla, a disgraceful facility, broken fences, unpainted and only after persistent insistence, it has finally been mown (yesterday) after 12 months, anyway that's another story about Telstra. I am involved in communications having installed many remote communication systems (GPRS, VHF and satellite) overseas for telemetry of environmental data, it is not rocket science. For mobile non service areas, it would seem that for every regional Telstra exchange in mobile non service areas, it is quite possible to install a 10 metre mast, install the communications infrastructure and provide a voice and text service to cover an immediate say 5km radius, this would be a relatively cheap and simple first step, surely not much more than a Sunday afternoon job. Thereby giving the rural residents and travelling public, some level of security for regional communications, or let us call it a red spot service. I know that at Numeralla we have fibre optic to the exchange and the full suite of multimedia could easily be provided for the immediate area on mobile/wireless, worth thinking about. Surely a sound business case for Telstra, or in fact a pilot demonstration project for a small rural Hamlet (Hon Turnbull's term) under NBN and/or this available funding.
- **Costing** – based on internet information and depending on the site, it appears for a cell tower, communications infrastructure and renewable power supplies where there is no mains available, that the cost would be in the order of \$150,000 – \$200,000. Based on the available budget of only \$100 million, we might expect something like 400 cell towers might be possible or around 55 per state. This will require a very focussed and well planned selection, budgetary and implementation process. Or perhaps due to Australia's ballooning labour rate, inefficiency in installing any infrastructure on budget and on time, plus green and red tape, we may only have funding for 100 towers nationally at \$1 million each, surprise me please!

This is a fairly substantial submission for the discussion, but given my lengthy community discussions with NDAI (Numeralla District Activities Inc) local and distant residents and the travelling public, it is very real. I trust it will be given the consideration due,

Yours faithfully,



*Llyod Smith
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ONYX Environmental Consulting & Services Pty Ltd*

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