

From: Paul Browning
To: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au
Cc: [Wendy Duncan](#)
Subject: Submission re Regional Telecommunications
Date: Sunday, 29 July 2018 2:20:13 PM
Attachments: [image003.jpg](#)
[image004.jpg](#)
[image005.jpg](#)
[image006.jpg](#)

Dear Committee members

Thank you for recently visiting Kalgoorlie and making yourselves available to community members. Unfortunately I was only able to attend the consultation meeting for a very short time due to time pressures involved in running my business.

This leads me to my first point about dealing with telco's as a small business operator: **TIME**. We don't have hours to spend on the phone trying to negotiate my way through the minefields of buck passing, frequently with overseas call centre operators who frankly have no idea where I am or what my issue is. The net effect is that I go round and round in circles in the telco's phone system getting nowhere.

I note there is a more recent trend to deal with telcos via online "chats" which are a bit of an improvement in that it takes up less time, but again, you never actually seem to reach a positive conclusion, because the person on the other end (if it is a person) never seems to know much more than the answers to "Frequently Asked Questions," which I've generally already read.

It's the same with Telstra, Optus and Vodaphone, from what I can see, and I just can't figure out why it is that telcos think so little of their customers that they fob them off continually with such appalling customer service. Surely it can't be good for business!

I have four other issues I'd like to bring to the committee's attention:

- . Telstra's practice of changing access arrangements to their mobile services via their wholesaler network;
- . Time taken to port a number from one telco to another;
- . 000 service; and
- . Telstra's "competitive" infrastructure provision process.

Telstra Access to Mobile Services by customers of their wholesalers

I completely gave up on Telstra 6 or 7 years ago because I could never resolve issues as per my first point (above) and because I stumbled over a Telstra wholesaler (Comsource) who told me he could give me full access to the Telstra network without me ever having to deal with Telstra. I couldn't sign up quick enough. The people at Comsource were a little taken aback as they thought I'd want to know how much they could save me. I told them I'd happily pay double NOT to deal with Telstra.

Initially Comsource couldn't help me with our mobile service so that remained with Telstra for some months, or maybe a year before they came on board as well and everything went very smoothly until one day I was driving through the WA wheatbelt with a friend. I had no mobile signal whatsoever, but my friend was only rarely out of service. A few days later I drove from Kalgoorlie to Perth, down Great Eastern Highway, with one of my staff, who had a Telstra mobile and a friend from Melbourne with a Vodaphone mobile. We all had identical iPhones at the time but my signal supposedly with full access to Telstra via Comsource was even worse than Vodaphone's, who make no pretences to

having full coverage.

I rang Comsource who were very surprised to learn of my issues and my opinion that they might as well be selling Vodaphone's mobile services because it was better than that they were selling from Telstra. After some days, they came back to me and confirmed that this was indeed the case, but what they had was the best deal they could get from Telstra. And if I required better coverage I was going to either have to go back to Telstra or try Boost Mobile, which they said was able to offer the full Telstra mobile service, but that it was pre-paid only and there was no customer service. Considering I did not consider that Telstra had any customer service either, I couldn't see that that could be a problem, so made the switch with one of our phones to Boost and was very pleasantly surprised that I did indeed seem to have identical service to that supplied directly by Telstra.

This prompted me to switch our other mobiles to Boost and the good service continued for quite some time (can't recall but may have been a year or two) until one day I was surprised at all the new mobile blackspots along the road between Perth and Kalgoorlie and asked friends whether they had signal. If they were with Telstra the answer was yes, so we'd run into the same problem of Telstra changing the deal. I contacted Boost via their chat facility, but no-one could help (presumably it was outside the scope of their FAQ's).

A few days later whilst I was still contemplating my [limited] options, I got a call from Comsource saying they'd resolved their issue with Telstra and could once again offer full access to Telstra's mobile service. So I signed back up with them and was delighted with my service, again for quite some months or a year or more, until last October (2017), when on a trip across the Nullarbor on the Eyre Hwy, I was again surprised to discover that others in our party of 9 or 10 had full coverage much of the way, but that my wife and I had no coverage with our Telstra mobile services via Comsource, identical to that of the couple of others with Optus and Vodaphone. When I got home and contacted Comsource they were again surprised the deal had changed and after some enquiries at their end, referred me back to Telstra. So I visited the Telstra shop here in Kalgoorlie and established three accounts for two mobiles and one data-only sim for an iPad. So far the service has been adequate but I haven't needed to contact them about anything.

My point is even when there is competition in the market, there isn't because Telstra, constantly and unconscionably, in my view, changes the deal, without any advice, let alone consultation.

Landline Porting

We continued to have a very happy relationship with Comsource for our Landline services but this year ICTouch, a local IT firm, also opened up as a telco and we thought that would avoid the bounce between telco and IT firm whenever there is a problem with the internet. This is where the telco tells us there is no problem with the phone line and advises us to contact our IT service provider and the IT people tell us we have no phone connection so contact the telco!!

We thought having a local telco/IT provider all-in-one would be a very neat solution and it has been a successful move that I would recommend to everyone, but it took THREE MONTHS to port the phone line from Comsource to ICTouch. ICTouch made the request to Comsource in February, who contacted us the same day to verify the request and processed it immediately, but it was not completed by whichever authority does this, until late May!

Whenever I've changed mobile providers that change has been processed within an hour or

so, and certainly within 24 hours, so why the porting of landlines should take months is a complete mystery, but it certainly does not encourage contestability and competition in the market.

000 Service

In mid June my wife had a fall walking our dogs early one Tuesday morning and broke her leg. I rang 000 and was very surprised to be asked what State and Suburb I was calling from. Surely we have dedicated 000 operators for each state. It rapidly became clear the operator was certainly not in WA as she seemed to have no idea where Kalgoorlie (let alone Boulder) was, and I have grave doubts she was even in Australia. She certainly spoke with heavily accented English and seemed to have far more difficulty understanding my Australian accent than anyone else ever has.

We were not at a street address, being on a vacant area of reserve land with no houses close by but she seemed incapable of taking directions and was insistent on finding our precise location on her electronic map which from her description was clearly wrong. I somehow got her to listen long enough whilst I gave her a clear description of our location and how to get there. The ambulance took ages to come (at least 15 minutes, despite it being less than 5 minutes from their base) and it later emerged in conversations with the ambulance service that they had received totally meaningless directions from 000. It was only when they listened to the recording of the call and heard my description that they knew immediately where to come. As one of them said, "listening to the call, we could feel your pain!" Thank God my wife wasn't in a life threatening situation.

Surely the great state of WA and the great Commonwealth of Australia aren't now so totally cash-strapped that we have to outsource our 000 service to the lowest bidder in Bangladesh.

Anti-competitive connection costs for new developments

My final point relates to a property development we undertook in 2015-16, when we constructed three home units on some vacant land immediately adjacent to our home in Boulder at 121 Piesse St. When the builders built the units at 48 Brookman St, they put a telecoms pit at the front of the front unit and installed conduits with appropriate wiring into each new home unit. The only thing required was for us to contact our telco to arrange to have landlines connected and for the various wires to be connected.

Our builder began that process in April or May 2016 but within a week advised us it was not something they were able to project manage for us due to the personal nature of much of the information that needed to be supplied so we dealt with our telco, Comsource, who were wonderful throughout the process, but very soon advised us the matter had to be dealt with via an AFR (application for reticulation) via the Telstra Smart Communities website. I was to learn that any sentence containing those three words was a nonsense. Comsource provided advice and follow-up for the next 6 or 7 months until I finally blew the whistle on the whole debacle.

There was a process of endlessly answering the same questions and providing the same information over and over which culminated in me sending an email containing the following:

"Please now see attached marked up communications plan. I am advised by the builder and electrician that all wiring required is in place through the conduits and the only requirements are for Telstra to connect at the pit and at the wall into unit 2.

"I might also add that neither of them, as tradesmen with well over 20 years experience have ever been asked to supply this detail of information at any stage in the past. Further, I ran into a Telstra technician socially recently who asked about the job and was amazed when I told him what was holding it up. His response being "It's a new property - it's wired like all new properties are wired. I had a look at it when it was almost complete one day when I was walking past and it took me less than a minute to figure out what would need to be done if ever I got the job but that must be nearly 6 months ago and you're still waiting. I better start looking for a new job - no business can survive if it pisses its customers off that badly."

"With that in mind, can we now PLEASE get this matter progressed, because your Telstra colleague is almost right - it's been 5 months since either the builder or I first started making approaches to Telstra to get this property connected. It simply can't be this hard! People have recovered from open heart surgery in less time than Telstra have taken to not install a phone service at this address."

After lodging the AFR in May 2016, in late October 2016, from memory, I received documentation for me to sign agreeing to a cost of some \$4,500 to \$5,000 to connect the phone line. I was expecting it to cost \$100 (or maybe \$500) so was staggered at the quote and asked for some justification and was airily referred to something called the Federal Government's competitive telecommunications infrastructure in new developments policy. This seemed to indicate that new telecommunications installations had to be on competitive commercial terms. But there was only one supplier (Telstra) and no room for negotiation. It was anything but competitive.

I contacted local telecoms firms who indicated their price for the installation to Telstra would be well under \$1,000 to dig the 50 metres of trench required and prepare the installation for connection by a Telstra technician. The trenching part of it was the biggest part and it would be around \$500.

I received 17 identical emails (ie one every week and after a while, every few days) from Telstra's Jonathon Brown of their New Development Contract Team in Melbourne, sending me the contract that I was to sign agreeing to their extortionate terms, but never once answering any questions I had or making even the slightest attempt to justify their charges. I even offered to dig the trench myself.

Finally, by mid December 2016, when it was clear Telstra were not going to budge and I could not see value in spending thousands connecting the landlines for the units, as they were by then rented for short-stay accommodation with wifi provided from our home alongside, I let the matter lapse.

I still cannot quite believe that it was so impossible to get a phone line connected to a newly built residential property in an urban area within a few hundred metres of a phone exchange in a major regional city in a first world country, at an acceptable competitive price. And if it were competitive, I would have got three lines connected.

At the Kalgoorlie meeting your committee conducted, your chairperson referred to the trust we have for institutions. I interrupted him to say I didn't have any trust for the institution of Telstra and I hope the above gives some indication as to why that would be the case.

To add to that, I find it extraordinary that a small business with very low energy and telecommunication requirements in a major regional centre in the 21st century, not only needs a back-up electricity supply but also a back up internet connection so that we can

guarantee continuity of service to our customers. This has involved an investment of some thousands, which I simply shouldn't have had to make.

I'm now 60 but I grew up on a new land farm in WA with a party-line phone, the line for which my father and our party line neighbours built with their own hands and at their own expense, and a 32V electricity supply provided from a bank of lead acid batteries charged by a Southern Cross engine and a Dunlight wind generator. We had a kerosene fridge and I recall none of it worked very well. I wonder how far we've actually come, 50+ years later.

Many thanks for the opportunity to contribute.

Yours most sincerely

Paul Browning

Licensed Settlement Agent

Managing Director

GOLDFIELDS SETTLEMENTS | *Helping you through the paperwork maze*

[63 Hannan St](#) (PO Box 10209) KALGOORLIE WA 6433

WE HAVE MOVED (just across the road, on the corner with Porter St)

Tel: [\(08\) 9021-4599](tel:0890214599) | Fax: [\(08\) 9021-8187](tel:0890218187) | Mobile: [04-1617-1809](tel:0416171809)

Email: paul@goldsetts.com.au | W: www.goldsetts.com.au or [Find us on Facebook](#)

Goldfields Settlements Pty Ltd ABN [69 123 399 584](#) is the licensee of Goldfields Settlements, trading as a licensed real estate settlement agency pursuant to the Settlement Agents Act 1981. The information contained in this communication should not be construed as legal advice and may be confidential or commercially sensitive. If you are not the intended recipient you must not copy this communication, disclose its contents to any other party, or take any action in consequence of it. Please delete and destroy all copies and immediately notify the sender on [08-9021-4599](tel:0890214599), or by reply email. Neither the sender, nor Goldfields Settlements take any responsibility for any material, including any attachments, added to or deleted from this email subsequently in any further dissemination of it.

