



Submission – Mobile Black Spot Program – Round 5A

It is vitally important that Round 5A of the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) focuses on delivering improved telecommunications to high priority natural disaster prone areas in regional and remote Australia.

My electorate of Indi has recently experienced the dreadful combination of devastating, life-threatening bushfires and telecommunication failures – the very worst combination of challenges experienced in disasters in regional and remote locations. Some areas in my electorate endured complete failure of vital telecommunications, including the regional towns of Corryong, Cudgewa and Walwa where the community was surrounded and isolated by fire.

It cannot be understated that telecommunication failures can and will cost lives in natural disasters and that measures must be taken to improve the fail-safe access of natural disaster prone areas to reliable telecommunication.

I strongly support the proposal of Round 5A to address the following priority areas

- a. High priority natural disaster prone areas particularly including those affected or prone to bushfire,
- b. New technology solutions in areas where low populations densities have discouraged applications in previous rounds, and
- c. Major regional and remote transport corridors.

The proposed assessment criteria - Criterion 1 – of providing new coverage, against the MNO's public coverage maps, should not exclude proposed solutions where improved coverage is delivered, especially to areas that have been affected or prone to bushfires.

Acknowledging the increasing challenges of technological solutions in more remote locations, Criteria 2 and 3 should not favour economic cost, over the benefits, albeit to smaller populations, of providing improved, vital telecommunications to areas that have been affected or prone to bushfires – especially where safety of human lives is in the balance without effective service.

I also wish to commend to the Department, the consultative model of the Indi Telecommunications Advisory Group – ITAG. The judicious and collaborative work of my electorate's advisory group results in a well-informed, local set of priorities. The group, that I chair, is comprised of representatives of the nine local government areas across Indi and the various telecommunications service providers. This model of collaboration is one that I commend in the consideration of key design points for future rounds of the MBSP. The role of ITAG ensures transparency of process and relevant, considered endorsement of MBSP priorities at the regional level.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Helen Haines', written over a faint circular stamp.

Dr Helen Haines MP
Independent Federal Member for Indi

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Cc: ITAG

Dr Helen Haines MP

117 Murphy Street
Wangaratta VIC 3677
T 03 5721 7077
E helen.haines.mp@aph.gov.au
W helenhaines.org

@helenhainesindi