

## **Submission on the design of the next round of the Mobile Black Spot Program (the MBSP), Round 5A**

from Kate Forster, concerned community resident

### **DEFINITION OF REGIONAL AREA BOUNDARIES NEEDS TO BE RECONSIDERED**

I live in Emerald, Victoria, a small village outside metropolitan Melbourne, in the Dandenong Ranges.

Emerald is outside the Melbourne telephone area code, part of an area code extending to the Mornington Peninsular. We are apparently on the edge of what is defined as regional, despite having had to pay STD fees for calls to metropolitan Melbourne for many years, including timed calls in the past. I question the current assessment of eligible areas, and suspect where the line is drawn may not represent our current disadvantaged or situation, with rural farms adjacent to our village. Funding has been an ongoing issue for interface council areas such as ours containing both rural and metropolitan areas. Sometimes this mix makes both metropolitan and regional funding unavailable. We have not been eligible for Black Spot funding like nearby villages and below I state a case for why we should be.

### **BLACK SPOT AREAS**

Despite Telstra maps no longer showing this, there are mobile black spots in our area and across the Dandenong Ranges and foothills, due to the hills, valleys and tall eucalypts. Every time I ring Telstra I have to repeat that they cannot text me a security code, as I am very unlikely to receive it. Mobile reception is even worse for some residents down the road with no reception in the house ever available, and outside also non-existent or unreliable. This is confirmed by Telstra technicians working in the street who say they aren't getting reception, and who have also advised that due to the valley and trees home aeriels are unlikely to address our reception problems. If we are to rely on mobile reception for emergencies, we need consistent reception.

### **NBN IS CREATING A SERIOUS SAFETY HAZARD FORCING RESIDENTS OFF MORE RELIABLE COPPER CABLES**

NBN is being pushed through our area, and the section of our street where mobile reception is poor to negligible is more than a kilometre from the node. One company has offered a resident a refund due to inability to provide acceptable speeds, but she cannot return to ADSL2+ which was providing a better service. Now if the power goes down she has no communication. Other residents will be forced into this position soon, although the date has been extended beyond June due to the

pandemic. Our environment also places us in an extremely vulnerable position for bushfire, the Dandenong Ranges are renowned for being one of the most bushfire vulnerable places in the world. We are also more vulnerable to storm damage to powerlines and property, due to the hills and tall trees, leaving communities without power for extended periods (days) at times. Repairs are also likely to be delayed due to increasing extreme weather conditions and bushfires, as access and road safety are impacted.

## LOCAL TOWER VULNERABILITY TO FIRE

At the same time the nearby Telstra tower in Monbulk is overloaded and buffering at times. This is likely to become a serious issue during emergency conditions such as storms and bushfires. This tower is also vulnerable to bushfire. We need to have alternatives to enable communication during weather and fire emergencies, including to the rural areas around us, where neighbours are distant. Optus also has coverage but it is patchy too.

I understand from my Telstra complaints consultant that families are already grieving and struggling with the loss of a family member, having transferred to NBN then not been able to get mobile reception to call an ambulance. This is my concern. No system is 100% reliable. But we currently on the verge of being forced to regress to a lesser service and lack of emergency communication.

I request that the **Mobile Black Spot Program (the MBSP), Round 5A** give careful consideration to areas such as ours which are being placed in a highly vulnerable position, losing the resilience we so need for our specific environmental issues. Why are we being doubly disadvantaged. We are not in the position of metropolitan areas. We are storm and bushfire prone, will have substandard NBN and little to no mobile reception in some areas.