

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:	Aurel E Dessewffy
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Website (if applicable):	
Date:	27 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? Yes 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.

A submission by - Aurel E Dessewffy of [REDACTED], Barwon Downs, Victoria 3243
(President of the Barwon Downs Community Group) [REDACTED]

In response to a community meeting held in Birregurra on Tuesday 4th February, I am writing to outline some common and also some of my own particular concerns regarding the mobile telephone and internet coverage in the greater Birregurra area (including in particular Barwon Downs) which lies within the Corangamite electorate of Victoria.

The Current Situation:

The terrain is undulating and in part quite hilly being at the northern edge of the Otways, the Otway State Forest and National Parks. Barwon Downs is the gateway to the Otways, the Great Ocean Road and the coast beyond. It lies just at the rise on the northern edge of the Otways and is flanked by two ridges on the East and West. The road to the south carries traffic from the Princes Highway and Birregurra to Forrest, Skenes Creek and Apollo Bay which makes it an important artery for tourism apart from regular business and residents' travel. Birregurra to the near North and Forrest to the even nearer South have been designated as townships for growth through residential increase and tourism. This will have an impact on Barwon Downs and its infrastructure needs.

Despite a Telstra tower at Mt Gellibrand there are significant 'black spots' with respect to mobile and wireless internet coverage both in the township of Birregurra and all of the surrounding district. Copper land line is in place but from what I have been advised by Telstra in 2009 new dwellings may not be able to be connected to the copper network in the more remote areas due to lack of capacity so the only option is mobile phone communication if at all. During bad weather even the local telephone landlines can be affected. As noted, in some cases people do not have landlines and even if they have some wireless coverage this can be badly affected by adverse weather conditions.

With regard to internet access broadband is not available via wireless signals in many places and ADSL connection is not available or performs poorly at the margins where it is in place.

The areas of concern include the following:

Public Safety/Emergency Situations – This includes residents and visitors to the district having access to emergency services as well as members of the local CFA brigades needing to contact each other by mobile phone when a call out occurs. The CFA is usually the first responder to emergencies including motor vehicle accidents, before the police, ambulance and SES. Given the black spots this is a serious problem.

As a matter of note, Barwon Downs was selected by the State Government as one of the first two townships that were the top priority to have 'Community Safer Places' established due the high fire risk in the area and the particular position of the village on the edge of the State Forest and National Park. It is a thoroughfare for tourists as well as normal residential and business traffic.

Business – Many of the residents of the district rely on the internet and telephone to conduct their daily business whether it is agriculturally based or not. This will include voice and data transmissions. In my own case, I have a widespread collection of clients including international ones where electronic communication is essential. My mobile connection at Barwon Downs

ranges from zero to two or three bars on the Telstra network. I may be having a conversation and the call drops out. This is and appears to be extremely unprofessional. If the caller has blocked their number I cannot even call them back on the landline!

With respect to internet access, wireless connection is impossible or highly unreliable in many areas including at Barwon Downs. ADSL as noted above is extremely limited in terms of availability so the majority of residents cannot access it. In my case I have ADSL but at peak usage periods by others my connection has dropped out regularly. I have had to upgrade the connection but it can still be a concern and as the copper wire deteriorates it will become worse.

Social – Many people rely on wireless communication via mobile or VOIP as well as other internet based social media and emails. There are limited social hubs in rural areas so people may become quite isolated if they cannot communicate electronically. This can have quite an impact on their well-being.

Education – In today's age good internet access is critical to being able to attain a good education and this is even more important in rural Australia where students experience additional disadvantages over their city brethren. Poor internet and mobile access further compounds their social and educational disadvantage.

Regional Development – As the population growth continues in the major Capital cities there has been a push to have people settle in regional towns and villages. Many people resident in places within a couple of hours of a major or Capital city have moved in over the past ten to twenty years and the push appears for this to continue. Access to satisfactory communications is critical to the success of this. A patchy service is a deterrent and anecdotal evidence has it that people and businesses have left where the service was below expectations. This will not serve Australia well and would be a missed opportunity.

Future Developments with NBN – It appears that over time with the roll out of the NBN programme in whatever form, the copper wire connection via the Telstra network will be degraded. At the same time small communities such as Birregurra and Barwon Downs in particular will not be connected. Thus they will be doubly disadvantaged in terms of phone and internet connection.

My Request:

As the president of the Barwon Downs Community Group and also on a personal basis, I request that the government actively promote the upgrading of the existing telecommunications towers to increase the range and spread of coverage as well as establishment of new towers in the Birregurra/Barwon Downs region.