

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: Alistair Brian Ross
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Date: 15/2/2014

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

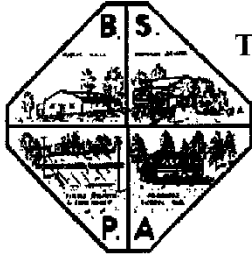
Mobile Coverage Programme

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.



THE BLACK SPRINGS PROGRESS ASSOCIATION



15/2/2014

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

The Manager,

The Black Springs Progress Association represents a very large geographic area south of Oberon NSW, ranging from Burruga and Black Springs in the southwest to near Taralga in the south and Gingkin to the southeast. This whole area encompasses National Parks; the World Heritage listed Jenolan Caves, rural farmland, small villages and a number of major roads including the Tablelands Way linking Canberra in the south with Mudgee in the north.

There is no mobile service at all in this region from Burruga to a few kilometres outside Taralga, an area which encompasses two major National Parks, a main road promoted as the alternate route to the Hunter from Canberra, as well as a very large farming area. There have been many accidents on the Abercrombie Road (Tablelands Way) where emergency services could not be contacted until a local person was able to use their landline to call for help causing delays which may have affected the outcomes for those involved. Campers and hikers in the Abercrombie and Kanangra Boyd National Parks who get lost or require urgent assistance need to wait until someone can drive out to the nearest farm to call for help or drive into Oberon to get mobile phone reception.

This is an area of extreme climate conditions, ranging from high snowfall and very low temperatures in the winter months to extreme dry, hot condition in the summer. Many people are unaware of these extremes as they travel through the area and are involved in accidents or incidents where emergency services need to be involved. Without mobile coverage, they often have to wait until someone comes along and then goes to the nearest property to phone for assistance. Due to the large tracts of state forests and the large property sizes in this area, help is often quite some distance and time away from the scene where it is required.

In this era of advanced telecommunication services being promoted by the various Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and the NBN, it is unacceptable to live in an area with no mobile service whatsoever. When the local landlines fail, as they often do after storms there is no means of calling anyone in case of an emergency, a situation

which could mean the difference between life and death in the case of a snake bite or serious accident on the farm or road.

Travellers on the Tablelands Way are mainly from large urban areas like Sydney, Canberra and areas down to Victoria, who are used to having mobile service wherever they travel. From just outside Oberon or Taralga (a distance of approximately 100 km) there is no reception, and this situation is the same throughout the rest of the district to Burruga, Black Springs, Edith, Jenolan Caves and beyond.

Broadband service to this area is mainly delivered via satellite services which do not provide an acceptable alternative to a reliable mobile service, as it is often affected by weather, congestion, high latency and other problems which make telephony service unacceptable at best, unavailable at worst.

There are many existing sites that already have Forestry, SES, Police or RFS towers and radio base stations that would be geographically advantageous for additional mobile cell sites. These locations would provide coverage to local areas that currently have no reception at all. Since the geography in this large area ranges from large hills and valleys to flat farm land, siting mobile towers to enable the widest coverage would be required – using existing emergency service sites would provide a good start to this problem.

Co-locating MNO facilities at these existing sites would provide the greatest coverage to the public for the various mobile networks at the least cost. Since there are quite a few existing radio tower sites in regional/rural Australia, adding mobile antennas to these is not a major issue. The largest problem would be backhaul from these cell sites to the base stations; again, there are various options that can be used depending on terrain and distance. Microwave backhaul is a good option where there is no existing fibre optic cable within reasonable distance, it is cost effective however is subject to fading and dropout in certain meteorological conditions.

Fibre optic backhaul is the best option giving the most reliable service, highest capacity and easy expansion for upgrading bandwidth, however could be less cost effective in rougher terrain or over longer distances. These factors all need to be considered for each black spot area or region to be addressed; the suggested cell site location at Shooters Hill below, would be best served by fibre optic cable backhaul as there is existing fibre within a reasonable distance.

One of the more advantageous areas to install a new cell site is the forestry tower at Shooters Hill, from where the coverage would be over an extensive area. This tower has line-of-sight coverage of an area from Black Springs, Edith, Gingkin, Jerrong, Porters Retreat, Paling Yards, Mozart, much of the Abercrombie National Park and surrounding areas. Not only would transmitting from Shooters Hill provide a long overdue and much needed mobile service to those living in these areas, but it would provide an invaluable means of communication in emergencies for those travelling through these areas who may be from urban areas where mobile phone service is taken for granted.

We have been too long without any mobile service in this part of the Oberon, Upper Lachlan and Bathurst shires and it is only a matter of time before lives will be lost due

to this lack of an essential service. It is not acceptable to have a mobile service in this area that is only 2 to 3 hours from Sydney and Canberra which isn't even the equal of that of many third world countries

Yours faithfully,

Brian Ross
for Black Springs Progress Association