

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: Anthony Hill

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Date: 21 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):

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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.

President Tony Hill



**Boro/ Mt Fairy
RFB
15803**

Boro/Mt Fairy RFS Mobile Phone Black Spots Submission February 2013

Responsibilities

- Boro/Mt Fairy RFS is responsible for an area that is not isolated but covers a small rural community and now includes major transport routes
 - Goulburn to Doughbouy Road – is taking increasing traffic from the Hume Freeway heading from Sydney to the NSW South Coast
 - Kings Highway – is taking heavy traffic between Canberra and the NSW South Coast
- As an RFS brigade, we are responsible for responding to motor vehicle accidents (MVA) – There have been fatalities and major injuries from MVAs in 2013 and road surface and signage has been improved in response, but the potential for further crashes is increasing due to increased traffic on two-lane traffic roads.
- RFS is responsible for responding to major bush and grassfires over an area of approximately 150 sq km with a perimeter of more than 70km including grassland, forest, dirt roads and major two-lane sealed highway throughways.
- As usual with RFS brigades, we are entirely dependent on volunteer staffing for firefighting, protection and support. In instances of responding to fires, we need to coordinate our volunteers effectively and without mobile phone coverage this task becomes very difficult. Our volunteers are usually engaged in work or farming activities and may not be near landlines while they are engaged on other activities.

Challenges

- As a measure of the potential dangers, in January 2013, Boro/Mt Fairy Brigade was involved (with other support) in halting progress of a highly destructive fire on a catastrophic fire-weather day, which meant that even though there were property and stock losses, there was no loss of life or houses.
- Significant mobile phone black spots affect our capacity to deal with and respond to incidents. In particular, these black spots affect Mt Fairy Road in the area where our Fire Station is located and much of the length of two other roads in our area Boro Road and Duckfield Road. We have responsibility for at least three local roads which are not through roads and can be more than 10 kilometres in some instances.
- Much danger exists when undertaking RFS operations and activities in the absence of phone coverage with the inability to report accidents or coordinate responses, apart from through the RFS radio network. As an example, our response to the Adams Road fire that occurred on 1 January 2013, suffered from a lack of volunteer coordination due to mobile phone

coverage black spots because phone coordination between our trucks and our call out coordinator could not easily be maintained.

- While our brigade vehicles have access to the RFS radio network, communication via this network does not cover all communications needs and lack of mobile phone coverage can hinder response to incidents. For example, it is not advisable to broadcast information about some serious incidents where they could involve injury or death to individuals who may have relatives or close friends listening on the RFS network. As another example, as an RFS brigade we are responsible for responding to motor vehicle accidents involving classified dangerous goods and we are likely to be required to communicate with specialist response teams and centres for information about the appropriate actions. We do not have any way of knowing what types of dangerous goods are being transported on our roads in advance of their carriage. We are often likely to have to coordinate our response to incidents with the local community who cannot be reached via the RFS radio network.
- A very useful task in the circumstances of a serious incident is an understanding of whether local people are in residence or not. This task is made very difficult to achieve quickly in the absence of mobile phone coverage from our vehicles or at the properties occupied by local people. Often fixed line services in rural areas can be unreliable and it naturally takes time to repair any faults.
- We appreciate that some efforts are being made to improve local telecommunications through the NBN. Unfortunately, we do not see a prospect of speedy assistance to our communication needs through this avenue. Firstly, the NBN is being planned to boost fixed line connections not mobile communications (even though fixed wireless and satellite services will be involved). Secondly, NBN rollout is planned to take a number of years.

Support

- In seeking better phone coverage, Boro/Mt Fairy RFS seeks to provide and receive support from:
 - Australian Government
 - local members of parliament
 - Palerang Council
 - phone network providers
 - local community
- Boro/Mt Fairy RFS wishes to highlight the significant need of the Boro/Mt Fairy community for effective phone support and the dangers that exist in its absence.
- Boro/Mt Fairy RFS supports mobile blackspot options that will maximise the capacity for the industry, including NBN and mobile phone operators to deliver maximum coverage of our area, which is most likely represented by Option 3 in the discussion paper
- Boro/Mt Fairy RFS does not support options that will require co-contributions of funding from local communities for installation of new mobile base stations, pointing out that other more populated areas of Australia are not required to make such contributions for mobile phone coverage that deals with emergency responses.
- If additional funding for new black spot mobile phone base stations is required for the Mobile Coverage Programme to be effective, then the Australian Government should work expeditiously with other levels of government and industry to make good this dangerous shortfall.

Tony Hill, President
on behalf of Boro/Mt Fairy RFB
28 February 2014