

# 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: Lynn Takayama

Name of respondent:	Lynn Takayama
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Website (if applicable):	
Date:	23 June 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):*

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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](mailto: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.

# **\$80 million Mobile Network Expansion Project - Mobile Black Spots in our area**

## **Mingoola Progress Association - Tenterfield Northern Tablelands**

The Mingoola Progress Association represents members from Mingoola and the surrounding areas: along the Mole River valley; along the Dumaresq River and valley; across the Queensland border including the Glen Lyon Dam, Maidenhead, and the surrounds. Across this area there is a range of quality of mobile phone coverage from very good (in a few areas), to very poor (in many areas) and zero (in some areas).

Mingoola is a small community situated approximately 50 kms west of Tenterfield and most of our members use the Bruxner Way as common access route to and from business/school/health/community centres to the west and to the east of us. In fact, the Bruxner Way is the only major transport route for all road transport from Tenterfield to Goondiwindi. It also provides access for traffic routed to Glen Innes, Inverell, Texas and Inglewood.

Telstra is the only mobile network operator in the area and shows on its maps very good coverage in most areas. A far smaller area is shown to have coverage if an aerial is used, and a much smaller area is shown to have no coverage at all. This is not the lived experience of people in this area. Our experience of mobile coverage here is as follows:

- very poor to no coverage along the Bruxner Way from near Texas to near Mingoola; and very poor coverage from near Mingoola to Sunnyside (10 kilometres west of Tenterfield);
- very poor coverage for a few kilometres, and then no coverage at all from Roma Farm (situated 4 kms from the Bruxner Way along Mole River Road) to Bolivia/Deepwater (the upper reaches of the Mole River);
- very limited coverage from Mingoola along the Dumaresq Valley;
- no coverage after Glen Lyon Dam until Stanthorpe.

### **Major Transport Route**

As already mentioned, the Bruxner Way is the only major transport route for road transport from Tenterfield to Goondiwindi. The Bruxner Way cuts through the area of the people that this Association represents and mobile coverage along this road between Sunnyside (10 kilometres west of Tenterfield) and Bonshaw is either patchy or non-existent. This poses a major problem for users of this transport route, particularly in the case of accident or, as the Principal of Mingoola Public School writes: "not being able to contact the school/parents while in transit between Mingoola and Tenterfield and the nagging worry that if something were to occur on one of our trips we would be unable to call for help."

## **A Small Community**

Mingoola is a small, tight-knit community and the members of the community depend heavily upon one another. Many of the properties in the area consist of thousands of hectares and, therefore, communication is only possible via telephone (landline or mobile), or email. As already mentioned, we are approximately 50 kilometres from the nearest centre: medical services, emergency services, etc. Many of us do not have mobile service, or a minimal and unreliable service.

The landline services to some of our properties are also very poor or non-existent. A search of Telstra's maintenance records will show the fundamental and recurring problems regarding landline phone service to this whole area. Several of our members have regular landline outages (three, four, five times per year) of varying lengths: from several hours to many days. Indeed, we know of one property where the landline connection is so old and so unreliable that Telstra has stopped taking any action to fix it. That property has very poor mobile reception, and for the past eighteen months has had no landline. The only way for them to make outgoing calls is to drive away from their home/office to a spot on the property where there is a modicum of mobile reception.

With very poor or no mobile service and an unreliable landline, communication becomes impossible, and our affected members are vulnerable: in the case of accident or natural disaster, in particular bush fires, medical emergencies or at any other time of need.

There have been many instances where people injured in road accidents have had to wait at the scene until a passing car can drive to a mobile reception area so as to be able to make calls for assistance to emergency services, such as police and ambulance services.

Many people in this area are operating small businesses, predominately agricultural businesses. In this day and age, being without reliable mobile service is a huge disadvantage in a very competitive business.

As well as agricultural businesses, we also has tourism ventures that are disadvantaged by the lack of a wide and reliable mobile service. Although there may be some tourists who are happy to experience a "Daniel Boone"-type holiday (i.e. no connection with the outside world), most potential customers need to be able to communicate via phone with their non-holiday lives, be it business lives or family lives.

## **Prone to experiencing natural disasters**

In January 2011 subsequent to the devastating floods, this area was declared a natural disaster area. The area is prone to flooding because of the confluence of five waterways into the Dumaresq River: Mole River, Beardy River, Severn River, Tenterfield Creek and Reedy Creek.

During the 2011 floods, people here were without landline services and power, and those of us who have no mobile service at all were without any ability to

communicate with the outside world. Even for those people in areas where there was some usable mobile coverage, the mobile tower ceased to function after thirty-six hours. This situation continued for 4 - 5 days. Given the distance between properties and the fact that many roads were impassible, this was a time of stress and vulnerability for us. There are elderly, sick and disabled people in our community who were particularly disadvantaged during that time. A reliable mobile service would go a long way to mitigating this undesirable situation.

Twice in the last eight years we've been exposed to drought conditions here. In these extreme circumstances it is even more important to be able to reliably communicate between properties regarding issues of personal safety, livestock husbandry, farm accidents and situations where people and/or animals are in peril. The lack of a reliable mobile service is a circumstance that exacerbates already very difficult situations.

Quad bike accidents have become the major cause of deaths on farms. A fall from a quad resulting in a serious injury is made far worse when the injured person has no way of contacting someone for help. Unfortunately, this situation in this area is not uncommon. Some years ago, a member of our community who was on his own on his farm fell from a quad bike and sustained a broken collarbone. Because there was no mobile coverage in this spot he was forced to ride 4 kilometres, in his injured state and in considerable pain, to the nearest neighbour where he then collapsed on the verandah and waited until someone returned home and could call an ambulance.

Recently there was a bushfire in this area. The local RFS members attended that fire which was in an area that had only limited mobile service. The fire truck was equipped with a radio, but unfortunately during that incident a tree fell on the truck and broke the aerial, which left the firefighters exposed and without any secure mode of communication with their RFS colleagues or, indeed, with anyone outside of their immediate vicinity. This situation puts the lives of firefighters and others at risk.