

Fri 1/04/2011

Senate inquiry team

Please find below my submission. For context, I am a Deputy Captain and brigade secretary in the RFS with 10 years in the NSW RFS, and I work in local government as a senior planning officer. Five (5) km west of Wyong there is no mobile reception - this is only 40 minutes from Sydney.

I firmly believe the NBN roll-out can be structured to improve the problems outlined here. Thanks to the LGSA for bringing this to my attention.

Some issues to consider include:

- the ability to use mobile phones for delivery of emergency messages in areas with poor or nil mobile phone coverage;
- the relationship between Extreme, Very High & High Risk assets as identified by Bush Fire Risk Management Plans on the NSW Central Coast and in regional areas, and the lack of mobile phone coverage and reliable fixed lines/internet availability in relatively isolated areas;
- the difficulty of justifying further investment from telcos to improve coverage if a pure business case is the only criterion (low population);
- the susceptibility of both telecom towers and power supplies to impacts from bush fires (location on top of hills often surrounded by forest);
- the importance of telco towers to emergency service management during even limited emergencies;
- the importance of telco towers to the general population during even limited emergencies;
- the importance of towers to manage telemetry for water supply and sewer management functions;
- the lack of clear and consistent standards available to agencies, government and business to mitigate risk from bush fire to telco towers, power supplies, control boxes, cabling up towers etc;
- the difficulty of funding such works and asset maintenance given the long time frames between severe events, particularly when a pure business case is the key criterion.

In my opinion, development of clear standards and methods to "harden" infrastructure, and funding methods to undertake this are the key areas for consideration. There are also opportunities to build on improved infrastructure to enable improved business, social connection and remote sensing associated with environmental management.

Regards  
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Secretary  
Peninsula Rural Fire Brigade