



Attachment A

Austar

Questions on Notice

[p. 26]

Ms Heap—It is obvious that consumers need to have the opportunity to know where they stand with regard to this, to get the service installed, and to arrange for that to happen, before digital switch-over. You need to arrange for an installer to come out and actually put the satellite dish up and do all the wiring. That is not something that happens overnight.

Senator FISHER—In some country areas that can take months. Do you have a view about the availability of technicians and servicemen who can do these installations? Is there a workforce that is really, willing and able to service rural and regional Australia and cope with demand as the rollouts happen?

Ms Heap—I do not have a clear view on that, but we can certainly take it on notice and provide further information after talking to our installers.

Senator FISHER—That would be helpful, thank you. And a map would help.

AUSTAR Response

Further to Senator Fisher's question relating to workforce, AUSTAR has undertaken high level analysis of a range of blackspot areas, and has used its knowledge as a satellite TV provider, installer and operator to inform its views on the likely availability of an installation workforce for blackspot areas.

As background, AUSTAR has a 700 staff National Operations Centre in Queensland that operates as a customer contact centre, and is the base for our Field Operations Team. This team manages a contracted group of 600 installers around Australia. AUSTAR installs approximately 3,400 customers per week, and installations fall into four categories: high density, medium density, low density, and remote owner-install.

An installer in high, medium and low density areas can typically complete one to three installations per day. Remote owner-install jobs are fulfilled by sending the home owner a self-install kit (satellite dish, set top box, wiring etc). The home owner is responsible for the cost of installation and maintenance in this case. In the first three categories, AUSTAR maintains ownership of these chattels.



An installation that includes an 'additional outlet', ie a second or third television set being connected to AUSTAR, requires additional time and typically take our installers an incremental 45 minutes per extra outlet.

A large number of blackspot areas may be in remote parts of Australia. To address these homes in a six month period will require an extremely high level of coordination. In most remote areas, there are no existing technicians, and instead a technician has to be scheduled, weeks and often months in advance, to travel from hundreds of kilometres away.

Similarly, a medium-density area such as Forster, NSW would have vast scheduling requirements when multiplied by the other blackspot areas in its Digital Switchover Group (2nd Half 2010), In this group there are a number of similarly sized blackspot towns, such as Byron Bay, East Lismore and Coffs Harbour - all of which will require multiple television-per-household installations.

A further complicating factor for the Digital Switchover Blackspots program will be the unknown total quantity of blackspot customers with a difficult call to action.

Overall, in AUSTAR's view, we believe our installation workforce could be coordinated to meet the requirements to support the satellite installations required. However, without a central scheduling agency, such as AUSTAR's, and without the scale of installing 160,000 homes per year, it will be challenging to ensure a seamless transition and to guarantee that even the remote or 'worst-case' installations occur before the switchover date. We believe that without appropriate management and logistics expertise it would be impossible to execute these installations in the timeframe required.

In addition, AUSTAR maintains ownership of the set top box and satellite dish, and as such handles 1,860 service and maintenance calls every week to address customer issues. Poor quality installations can significantly impact the quality of the digital satellite television reception.

The Government will need to consider the implications of resource, quality of install and follow-up service calls on top of its initial installation program.

Re Senator Fisher's question relating to a map of blackspot areas, AUSTAR is unable to provide such a map to the Government, but we would very much appreciate the opportunity to receive this information should it become available from the Digital Switchover Taskforce, the Department or the ACMA.