

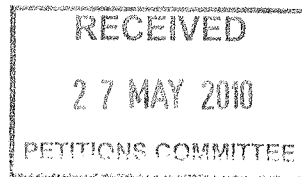


SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

Ms Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

26 MAY 2010



Dear Ms Irwin *Julia*

Petition regarding mobile phone coverage at Turkey Beach and Rodds Bay

Thank you for your letter dated 18 March 2010 in relation to a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions, concerning mobile phone coverage at Turkey Beach and Rodds Bay.

The Australian Government understands the importance of mobile telephony to Australians. The last few years have seen the three major mobile phone carriers extend the national coverage of their networks on a commercial basis. The Vodafone Hutchison Australia networks cover more than 94 per cent of the Australian population. Optus provides 3G services to 96 per cent of the Australian population and Telstra claims its *Next G* network now provides mobile coverage to 99 per cent of Australians.

The provision of mobile phone coverage in a particular area is primarily a commercial decision made by mobile phone carriers. In making the decision to extend coverage to a particular area, a mobile phone carrier will consider a range of factors, including site availability, cost structures, likely levels of demand from users and overall economic viability of the service.

Residents of Turkey Beach and Rodds Bay may wish to contact Telstra, Optus and Vodafone Hutchison Australia to make their needs known. I have attached the contact details of the carriers for reference. It can be useful to involve local government in identifying potential demand for mobile services in an area. Information such as projections of population growth and records of traffic volumes can be helpful in assisting carriers to make informed decisions about whether to extend coverage to certain areas.

Telstra, Optus and Vodafone Hutchison Australia coverage maps indicate there is patchy coverage in the Turkey Beach and Rodds Bay area. The Optus maps show that the area is to be provided with better coverage in the future. The coverage maps are available online at www.telstra.com.au/mobile/networks/coverage/maps.cfm, www.optus.com.au, www.vodafone.com.au and www.three.com.au.

There are a number of factors that can interfere with mobile reception and, therefore, affect a user's ability to obtain or maintain a mobile phone signal at any given time or in any particular place. These factors include mountainous or hilly terrain, road cuttings, buildings and tunnels. While not all potential sources of interference can be overcome, local service providers should be able to advise of ways to minimise interference.

One effective way to increase coverage is to use an in-car kit with an external antenna. The most appropriate antenna may vary between networks, and prices vary according to the quality. These accessories can be readily obtained from mobile phone shops and dealers.

The particular handset used can also affect mobile reception. It is important for consumers to understand that different mobile phones have different capabilities and how each phone performs on the network is dependent on both the network coverage and the particular device. Telstra puts a 'blue tick' label on the phones it recommends for use in poor coverage areas. These phones make the most of available reception. Other service providers can also provide advice on the best handsets for local conditions.

In areas that are sparsely populated or have little passing traffic, the only commercially viable option for mobile phone services is via satellite. Satellite mobile phone services cover the entire Australian landmass and population and are available from a number of providers.

Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme

The *Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme* (the Scheme) improves the affordability of mobile communications for people living and working in areas without terrestrial mobile coverage, by providing subsidies for the purchase of satellite phone handsets.

The Scheme provides up to \$1000 for eligible applicants who live in areas without terrestrial mobile coverage, and up to \$700 for eligible applicants who live in areas that have coverage, but spend significant periods in non-coverage areas.

In 2009, I announced enhancements to the Scheme and its extension until June 2013. These improvements include:

- an increase in the subsidy level for people who live in areas without access to terrestrial mobile phone coverage, from 60 per cent of the handset to 85 per cent—the cap on individual subsidies remains at \$1000 per handset; and
- the ability for health and emergency service organisations to access additional handsets if they can demonstrate a need. Previously these organisations could only access two subsidies.

Information about the Scheme, including the application form, is available on the website of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy at www.dbcde.gov.au/satphone. An information kit can be obtained by contacting the Scheme administrator by phoning freecall 1800 674 058 or via email satphone@dbcde.gov.au.

Thank you for bringing the petition from the citizens and visitors of Turkey Beach and Rodds Bay to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband,
Communications and the Digital Economy

Carrier contact details

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