



SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE



The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

05 FEB 2013

Dear Mr ^{John} Murphy

703/1134 - Telecommunication services in Boondooma, Dulong and Monogorilby

Thank you for your letter dated 17 September 2012 concerning a petition submitted for the Committee's consideration regarding telecommunication services in Boondooma, Dulong and Monogorilby. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

Mobile phone coverage

The Australian Government understands the importance of mobile telephony to Australians. However, for the most part, the extension of mobile coverage across Australia has been based on commercial decisions by carriers. Since the sale of Telstra, the government is no longer able to direct telecommunications companies to expand the coverage of their networks.

In making a 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.

The residents of Boondooma, Dulong and Monogorilby may wish to contact Telstra, Optus and Vodafone Hutchison Australia to make their needs known. I have enclosed the contact details of the carriers for reference.

Local governments can assist in identifying potential demand for mobile services in the area. Information such as projections of population growth, visitors to the region and records of traffic volumes can be helpful in assisting carriers to make informed decisions about whether to extend coverage to certain areas.

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. While not all potential sources of interference can be overcome, 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 or 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. Each of the mobile phone providers are able to provide advice on the best handsets for local conditions. For example, Telstra uses a 'blue tick' label on the phones it recommends for use in poor coverage areas.

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

Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme

The residents of Boondooma, Dulong and Monogorilby may be eligible to apply for a subsidy under 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 or up to \$700 for eligible applicants who live in areas that have coverage, but spend more than 180 days across a two year period in non-coverage areas.

Under the scheme's rules, those eligible to apply include individuals, small businesses, community groups, not-for-profit organisations, Indigenous corporations, emergency service organisations, health organisations and educational institutions.

The application form for the scheme is available from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Visit www.dbcde.gov.au/satphone for further information. An information kit can be obtained by contacting the scheme administrator on 1800 674 058 or via email at satphone@dbcde.gov.au

Telecommunications legislation

Under the legislated Universal Service Obligation (USO), all people in Australia are entitled to have reasonable and equitable access to a standard telephone service and payphones on request wherever they reside or carry on business. Telstra, as the primary universal service provider, is required to deliver the USO. Generally, under the USO Telstra provides a basic fixed line-telephone service which allows for access to local, national and international calls, the emergency call service, operator assisted services and directory assistance.

The USO does not require Telstra to provide mobile services, broadband or other enhanced telecommunications services. Subsequently, there is no current legislation requiring any carrier to provide mobile services on request.

National Broadband Network

The government is committed to high-speed broadband for all Australians, not just people who live in the capital cities. On 7 September 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that regional Australia will be given priority in the National Broadband Network (NBN) rollout. NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) has brought forward the introduction of wireless and satellite services so that people in regional Australia can get access to better broadband as soon as possible.

On 22 June 2012, NBN Co announced a list of local government areas in Queensland that will be connected to the NBN fixed wireless network – this included the South Burnett and North Burnett Regional Councils.

The next-generation NBN fixed wireless and satellite networks are being engineered specifically to deliver high-speed broadband to regional and remote communities, with higher speeds to become available as technologies improve. These services will be the equivalent of, or better than, what many people experience with ADSL today.

The residents of Boondooma, Durong and Monogorilby can visit www.nbnco.com.au/rollout/ for more details about the NBN rollout in their area. This website includes an interactive map and information on how to connect to the NBN once it is available.

The NBN will ensure that every community in regional Australia gets fair access to affordable high-speed broadband. The government's commitment to a uniform national wholesale price for NBN services means that, for the first time in Australia, people will pay the same wholesale price for the same basic service, whether they live in the city, in regional Australia or in more remote parts of the country.

The NBN is the single largest infrastructure investment ever made by an Australian Government and is accompanied by historic reforms to the telecommunications sector. The NBN is about more than just having a faster internet connection—it will produce significant economic and productivity benefits for Australia, for decades after the rollout ends.

Thank you for bringing the petition from the citizens of Boondooma, Durong and Monogorilby 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

Mr Nigel Beaman
Area General Manager, Southern Queensland
Grd/146 Herries Street, Toowoomba QLD 4350
Email: southernqueenslandtcw@team.telstra.com
www.telstra.com.au/telstracountrywide/contact-us/

Optus Community Relations
Email: communityrelations@optus.com.au
www.optus.net.au

Ms Trudy Schmidt
National Community Relations Manager
Vodafone Hutchison Australia
PO Box 388
ST LEONARDS NSW 2065
Tel: 1300 302 703
www.vodafone.com.au