



Australian Government

Department of Broadband,  
Communications and the Digital Economy

FAXED  
20/11/08



our reference

Ms Joanne Towner  
Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Towner

**Follow-up to 24 September 2008 Roundtable hearing**

On 24 September 2008, representatives of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) appeared before the Standing Committee on Petitions. The purpose of this letter is to respond to those matters that Departmental representatives took upon notice to answer in the course of the round table hearing.

The Department has identified the following matters and provides the following response:

In relation to the petition presented by Ms Neal MP concerning Telstra Coverage on the Central Coast, Mr Broadbent MP asked whether the former government's OPEL initiative would have provided improved telecommunications coverage in the Mangrove Mountain – Wisemans Ferry areas of New South Wales.

Under its Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth, OPEL Networks Pty Ltd was required to provide an Implementation Plan for the Government's approval, demonstrating that it could achieve the coverage of underserved premises to which it had committed when its proposal was accepted. I am advised that that proposal would not have delivered significantly improved coverage to the areas in question within the Robertson electorate.

It is important to note that the Department's analysis of OPEL's Implementation Plan confirmed OPEL's own analysis of its network coverage, which equated to 72 per cent of the required number of underserved premises. The Department determined that this level of coverage was not reasonably equivalent to the minimum of 90 per cent coverage of those identified underserved premises required under the Funding Agreement, and therefore the Agreement was automatically terminated, in accordance with the provisions of that Agreement.

In relation to the Mangrove Mountain Petition, Mr Adams MP asked if the Department had communicated with the petitioners, in relation to mobile phone coverage. I indicated at the hearing that the Department had not been in direct communication with the petitioners. The Committee Secretariat advised after the hearing that this was the correct course of action as they do not provide the names and addresses of petitioners to departments. I understand that the Secretariat conveyed this information to Mr Adams MP.

In relation to the petition presented by Ms Marino MP concerning ABC radio broadcasting in Nannup Western Australia, Ms Marino raised some concerns regarding emergency warning announcements. Specifically, Ms Marino asked, what arrangements are in place to provide (a) local weather information and (b) emergency warning information to Nannup residents via the Local Radio service and under what circumstances is this information broadcast?

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has advised that the ABC Local Radio service received on 98.1 FM in Nannup emanates from the studio in Karratha. However, the ABC has the ability to temporarily alter the satellite program source so that the most relevant information is made available to affected residents during natural disasters. In the event of a natural disaster, such as bush fires or cyclones affecting the Nannup area, the ABC would provide the satellite downlink facility in Nannup with the Local Radio program feed from Perth or Kalgoorlie until the circumstances in the area had improved.

The ABC has advised that it has not previously needed to change the program input for the Nannup Local Radio service. However, the ABC has provided two examples of program feed changes it has previously made during natural disasters in WA. During the Boorabin National Park fires in January 2008, the normal ABC Local Radio program feed from Kalgoorlie provided emergency information to southern WA Local Radio transmission sites (Boorabin National Park is located between Southern Cross and Coolgardie). In addition, during the 2007/2008 cyclone season, warnings from the Karratha ABC Local Radio studios were provided to the relevant Kimberley and North West WA ABC Local Radio transmission sites.

In addition to these arrangements, the ABC has a portable 'Flyaway' FM transmission facility based in Perth that is designed to be used temporarily in any location. This facility provides redundancy and reliability should an ABC Local Radio service be disrupted in times of natural disasters.

The portable facility can be quickly deployed to an area where the ABC Local Radio transmission facilities have been made inoperable or unreliable (the portable facility can be transported by road or light plane or helicopter to the area in need). A portable generator is transported along with this facility. The facility operates on the FM Band.

The portable facility can be used to re-broadcast a signal from an ABC studio in the affected area, in the event that the local transmission facilities are not in operation. However, the facility would need to be located close to a studio in order to pick up the program feed. If a local program feed is not available, the portable facility can be used to

re-broadcast a signal from the satellite. It can also be used as a stand-alone broadcast facility. Depending on the local topography and tree cover in an area, the portable facility would be expected to transmit to an area of about 25 kilometres from the transmission point.

ABC Local Radio content is also available from a dedicated internet website for the South West of WA (Bunbury) which includes local news, weather, events and emergency information at: [www.abc.net.au/southwestwa/radio](http://www.abc.net.au/southwestwa/radio)

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. I hope this information assists the Committee in its consideration of these matters.

Yours sincerely

Abul Rizvi  
Deputy Secretary

19 November 2008