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28 December 2002

The Secretary,
House of Representatives Communications,
Information Technology & the Arts Committee
R1, Suite 116
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

SUBMISSION: Inquiry into the Structure of Telstra

This submission is concerned with the efficient provision of services to end-users in regional, rural and remote areas.

Simply splitting the core network from other Telstra business will not address the major problem which I encountered when seeking to have a telephone connection installed at my current residence in Boatswains Point, South Australia. This problem is that customer service officers have no local knowledge.

The people I had to deal with were based in Brisbane, Perth, and Ballarat. None of them knew anything about Boatswains Point, not even where it is. The first few I dealt with couldn't even find it on a Telstra database because it was listed as Boatswain not Boatswains.

I knew when I first rang Telstra to request connection that I would need an FRA (Fixed Radio Antenna) connection as that is what we all have here, and I had spoken to a recently retired Telstra technician who lives locally. This excellent service is what was eventually installed.

However, the first person I spoke to, in Brisbane I think, assured me that we have perfectly good telephone lines when I passed on the information about the type of service I would need. Consequently I drove 300 km from Adelaide to Boatswain's Point and 300 km back for a 5 minute meeting with a technician who told me what I already knew and what I had told my first contact, that I would need an FRA connection. Needless to say this connection could not be made at the time.

Then followed a series of phone calls with people in remote centres in which we covered the same ground concerning the location of Boatswains Point several times. Included in this process were several periods of waiting for several days for someone to call me back.

About a month after my initial request we had a booking – a technician would be coming some time between 10.00 & 5.00. Close to 5.00 two technicians arrived. One was the person who had been assigned the job by someone in one of those distant

centres – only he had no training or experience at FRA installation. So the other was someone taken off another job when it was realised that the first one couldn't do ours!

A month is too long to wait for a service to be installed! There need have been no delay if I could have dealt with someone local from the first instance. Someone local would have known which technicians had the necessary training.

I was also amazed to discover that when the technician who came to our first appointment needed to phone for information he had exactly the same problems that I did. First he was put on hold while listening to recorded Telstra commercials, then he was through to someone far away who didn't have a clue about our local area and so had to go through the same rigmarole as became familiar to us just to describe the location.

When I commented on this the technician replied that it was something that he had to go through many times.

This is hardly efficient! The people in call centres are courteous enough and eager to please, but for an efficient service there is more need for knowledge than charm!

Whatever its structure, Telstra will not be able to provide an efficient and timely service to people in rural and remote areas if that structure does not include a well-informed local presence, in the local region for example, at the level where simple arrangements such as the installation of a telephone connection can be made.

(On the other hand, now that I have a service I am delighted with the technology. I use the Internet for my work, designing online training course, and have been amazed to find that I now have a faster and more reliable Internet connection than I did in Adelaide or than my daughter does in Canberra.

As far as I am concerned the technology is great but the customer service extremely inefficient.)