

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings May 2016

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 14

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 115, 05/05/2016

Topic: Towers

Senator Reynolds, Linda asked:

CHAIR: I have a couple of follow-up questions, including one I want to follow up on from the issue that Senator Back raised. Obviously, it is an extremely important issue not just for Western Australia but also the rest of Australia. In relation to bushfires and the criticality of having mobile phone access and also 3G or 4G, going back to Senator Back's question, you said there were extra points. Is it just extra points for the extended power that they have on the towers? Are there also extra points for blackspots that are actually in recognised bushfire prone areas?

Mr Windeyer: I will just see if we have someone here who can answer that question. The details are in the guidelines. While there are extra points for the power component, there are not extra points for particular locations. So location wise there are not points

Answer:

- The Mobile Black Spot Programme guidelines include extra points in the assessment process for proposed mobile base stations with extended auxiliary power capacity to enable operation without external power, such as during times of emergencies and natural disasters.
- Under rounds 1 and 2 of the programme, Federal Members of Parliament were invited to nominate priority locations within their electorates which received additional points in the assessment process. This allowed MPs to nominate areas prone to natural disasters.
- Nobody can predict which areas will next be impacted by natural disasters like floods or bushfires, making it impossible to allocate priority points for these areas on a purely objective basis. As such, MPs are equipped with local knowledge of priority areas in their electorates and are best placed to allocate areas of need.
- All of the locations to receive new coverage under the Mobile Black Spot Program have unique coverage needs, and allowing Mobile Network Operators to determine the rollout timetable will ensure all base stations are deployed as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- State governments have also provided financial co-contributions to the programme, and have targeted their funding towards their priority locations.
- The full assessment criteria included in the Mobile Black Spot Programme Round 2 Guidelines are available on the Department of Communications and the Arts' website at www.communications.gov.au/mobile_coverage