ML Davis,
Merringina,
Brewarrina. 2839
Ph/Fax 02 68296012
25/04/05

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee,
Department of the Senate, Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

**Re: Impending Sale of Telstra**

**Service As of Now**

I feel that communications in our area are not up to a satisfactory standard, in terms of pricing, reliability and access.

I was "upgraded" to CDMA WLL (Wireless Local Loop) this was done as a "knee jerk" reaction to the Australian Government promise that all dial up internet speeds would be at least 19.2kbps, which could not be considered adequate for businesses operating today. Our reliable DRCS (Digital Radio Concentrator System) was replaced with WLL, this is a list of ongoing problems:-

- Decreased reliability i.e. phone service unreliable drop outs still occurring
- Poor voice quality, especially when talking WLL to WLL
- Beeping and sounds on lines
- Fax machines incompatibility with WLL sometimes don't receive the fax
- Extra prefixes needed to send faxes previously it was possible to ring my father who is 80 and not technologically proficient and send a fax on the one call. Now, I must dial him let him know that I wish to send a fax, hang up, enter the magic 12622 prefix and then dial his number to send fax ie 2 calls instead of 1.
- Faxes only capable of 9.6 kbps
- Hand held phones decreased distance and voice quality
- Calls not being connected i.e. the phone rings as busy when it is not or fails to ring
- No increase in internet speed compared to DRCS. Under the USO, an internet speed of 19.2 kbps was guaranteed, as this has not occurred surely Telstra should be obliged to provide 2 Way Satellite at dial up prices.

This "upgrade" 2 years on, has not provided us with the level of phone service that we had prior. It is these types of outcomes that stimulate cynicism in rural Australia

about Telstra and the Australian Government commitment in providing basic verbal communication service to all residents of Australia.

**Internet**

The lack of data speed with WLL, has meant I had to install 2 Way satellite (256/64kbps) internet to operate our farming enterprise (banking, stock sales and product research), for communication via e-mails and searching the internet. This service is expensive; residents able to access broadband in major rural and urban areas pay less than $29-95/month for a similar service, whereas 2 Way satellite under the HiBiS Scheme with Telstra is $69-95/month plus $129 connection fee. If you happen to reside in the extended zone the installation cost is $349 as travelling is charged on the first 200 km. Although the HiBiS scheme allows us access, a 220% pricing differential on monthly costs does not appear to be equitable. Access is not merely the availability of service but also the price at which this service can be accessed.

**Untimed Local Call Access**

The access available for rural and remote customers to untimed local calls is limited. The distance based pricing structure of Telstra is antiquated, we no longer have telephonists employed to connect us through numerous exchanges to achieve long distance calls nor do we have kilometre after kilometre of overhead wires to maintain, this has all been replaced by radio towers and underground fibre cables. We have all moved on from the old system and expect Telstra's pricing to do the same.

In my case, on the exchange/charge point Goodooga, we have untimed local calls to just 3 seven digit prefix numbers that is a maximum of 300 fixed phone connections. A business connected to the Sydney exchange/charge point would have access to approximately 3,000,000 fixed phone connections. I reside in the electorate of Gwydir (approx 85,000 people) using 32km radius around the charge point of Goodooga this area 3,200sq kilometres covers $1/60^{th}$ of my electorate, yet in the electorate of Grayndler (approx 85,000 people ) in Sydney (29sq kilometres) the same 32km radius is capable of providing untimed local calls to 100 such electorates. To put it simply, on Goodooga charge point compared with Sydney charge point a fixed phone subscriber has 1/10,000th the opportunity of an untimed local call connection. I have very limited basic services (bank, hospital, chemist doctor etc ) that I can call at an untimed local call rate. See attached maps.

Compare this with the written form of communication, Australia Post, when I purchase a stamp for a standard letter this covers all Australia. I am not asked if it is a community, regional, intercity or interstate stamp with pricing variance to match.

It is highly iniquitous to have Electorates governed by number, but untimed local calls based on area for rural and regional Australia. The continuation of this policy will add to the urban drift, as young people leave seeking technology, this will increase the average age of residents left in regional and rural areas. Rural and

regional subscribers should be entitled to untimed local call connections (i.e. access to the same number of fixed phones) similar to their city cousins, in view of the technological advances that have occurred. The impending full sale of Telstra and the Australian Government desire to provide similar level of service (access and pricing) for communication users across Australia should see this problem addressed.

**Recommendations**

On reading the Estens Report, Recommendation 8.1 appears to be a "get out of jail free card" for further upgrades and maintenance of service to rural Australia.

RECOMMENDATION 8.1

Telstra should be required to maintain an ongoing local presence in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The requirement should only apply to Telstra consistent with its status as the Primary Universal Service Provider. The requirement should not be unduly prescriptive or burdensome, and should be broadly compatible with Telstra's commercial interests.

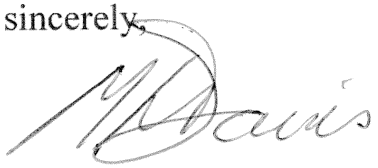
What ever happened to "Goldilocks and The Three Bears?"

It is this recommendation that causes me to be a concerned resident of rural Australia and I am wondering what the future holds for rural and regional Australia in relation to basic verbal communications.

My recommendations would be:-

- All residents of Australia be considered in USO not part thereof
- All residents of Australia to have equitable access in structure and pricing for both fixed phone and internet
- Regional and rural Australia has 2 working days for maintenance and fault fixing by service providers not 3 as at present.
- Call areas to be set by USO, not at the discretion of service provider ie; community calls, regional calls as supplied by Telstra at present.
- Untimed local call areas in regional and rural Australia to be enlarged to provide equity of service and access.
- Updates in technology and pricing in major cities be available for rural and regional Australia, within 1 year.
- Independent review to be conducted every two years to ensure equity of service.

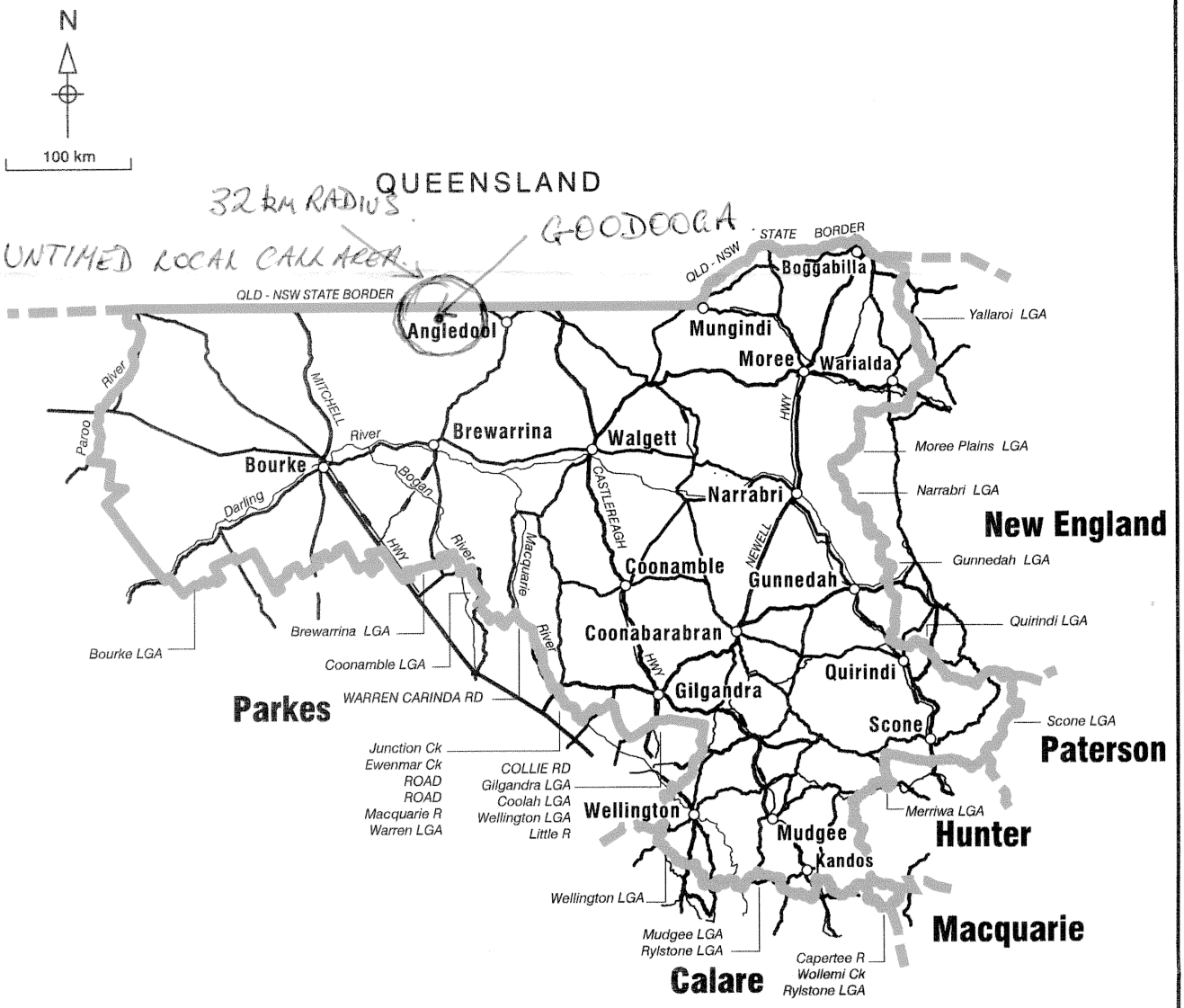
Yours sincerely,



Michael Davis

# COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL DIVISION OF

# GWYDIR




Divisional boundary

Adjoining divisional boundary

Division area 185 604 sq km

Railway line

3,218.49 KM
COVERED BY 32KM RADIUS.

2000

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Australian Electoral Commission AEC

Australia Members page.

AEC - Divisional Office Contact Numbers and Addresses

Demographic Rating

Rural

| 3 October 1998 Election | 6 November 1999 Referendum | 10 November 2001 Election |
|---|---|---|
| **Enrolment:** 72 930<br><br>**Informal Vote:** 3.95%<br><br>**Turnout:** 95.37%<br><br>**Seat Status:** Safe National<br><br>**Two Party Preferred:**<br>ALP: 36.42%<br>NP: 63.58% | **Enrolment:** 73 637<br><br>**Informal Vote:**<br>Republic Question 0.60%<br>Preamble Question 0.63%<br><br>**Turnout:**<br>Republic Question 94.75%<br>Preamble Question 94.74% | **Enrolment:** 84 602<br><br>**Informal Vote:** 4.53%<br><br>**Turnout:** 95.12%<br><br>**Seat Status:** Safe National<br><br>**Two Party Preferred:**<br>ALP: 35.12%<br>NP: 64.88% |

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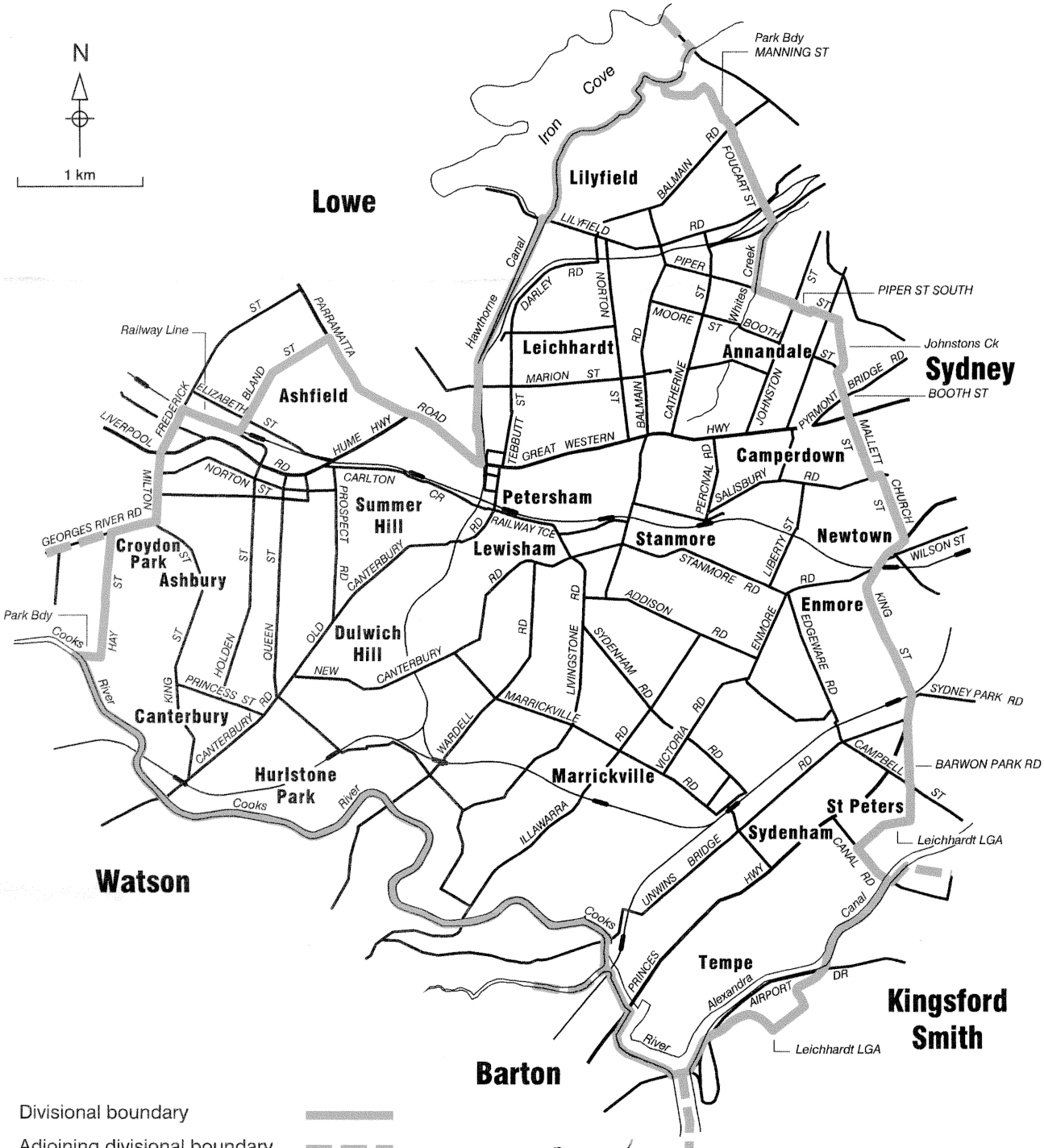
AUSTRALIA

# COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL DIVISION OF
# GRAYNDLER




Divisional boundary

Adjoining divisional boundary

Division area 29 sq km

Railway line

3,218 sq km
Covered by 32 km radius.

2000

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*Australian Electoral Commission* AEC

| 3 October 1998 Election | 6 November 1999 Referendum | 10 November 2001 Election |
|---|---|---|
| **Enrolment:** 85 901<br><br>**Informal Vote:** 5.21%<br><br>**Turnout:** 92.59%<br><br>**Seat Status:** Safe Labor<br><br>**Two Party Preferred:**<br>ALP: 72.32%<br>LP: 27.68% | **Enrolment:** 86 579<br><br>**Informal Vote:**<br>Republic Question 1.20%<br>Preamble Question 1.25%<br><br>**Turnout:**<br>Republic Question 93.44%<br>Preamble Question 93.40% | **Enrolment:** 86 146<br><br>**Informal Vote:** 6.56%<br><br>**Turnout:** 91.95%<br><br>**Seat Status:** Safe Labor<br><br>**Two Party Preferred:**<br>ALP: 71.29%<br>LP: 28.71% |

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