

National Broadband Network Taskforce

From: wgardens [wgardens@skymesh.com.au]
Sent: Friday, 28 March 2008 9:12 AM
To: National Broadband Network Taskforce
Subject: National Broadband Network

To whom it may concern

My wife and I have been operating a small Bed & Breakfast on the edge of the Grampians National Park in western Victoria for the past 14 years.

During that time we have developed a popular business, particularly with International Tourists, who now make up over 60% of our total guests.

This is despite the problems we have had with basic communications for many years. Our local Laharum Telephone exchange still operates on the antiquated Pair Gain System. In the late 1990's, we had so many problems with landlines, that we were given a dedicated line in order to get a reliable dial-up access to the internet. (very slow at 28k). Because of the many problems in the area at the time, and the overloaded exchange, we were even promised a new Telephone Exchange, which was to be completed by July 2000. The Laharum exchange was to be moved to the Wartook Valley, and we were given the project number. (352482).

As the very dry years continued, the problems with landlines ceased, so the new exchange was never built as, "it was no longer needed, there have been no problems in the last 12 months and the expense is not warranted." Now many years, later the Laharum exchange still cannot provide ANY broadband service, and we still cannot get any mobile phone coverage.

Over the 14 years we have lost many thousands of dollars in business, because when we are not available the only contact is an answering machine. If you attempting to book accommodation you want an immediate response.

The Wartook Valley beside the Grampians National Park, is an increasingly popular tourist area already has over 70 houses. Lots already available has potential for a doubling of the population, with many other small lots and small farms in the adjoining area. There are over 30,000 day visitors and in excess of 40,000 bed nights, plus another 90,000 visitors to the picnic area at nearby Zumstein in the Grampians National Park.

In 2005, we applied for a Broadband subsidy, and in November 2005 was connected to satellite "Broadband" with Bordernet. We paid \$49.95 a month, for a 256k/64k service which seemed to be OK for the first month. Early in 2006 the system slowed, and we soon had a service that was slower than our old dial-up service. During the latter half of 2006 we had visits from technicians and had modems and satellite modified with no improvement. By December 2006, the satellite service had deteriorated to the point where the so called Broadband service would take up to 3 times longer than dial-up, to load websites.

In February 2007, we switched off the satellite and took our case to the Telecommunications Ombudsman in March. Because of unsatisfactory responses from Bordernet, the TIO took until December 2007 to resolve the issue. As a result, we received a refund, which then allowed us to try another provider.

We had another satellite service installed in February 2008, with Skymesh. We pay \$49.95 for a 1Mb/512k service which is proving better than the old Bordernet service. However this can still not be called a "Broadband service". Most emails are still quicker using dial-up than the satellite, and although downloading web information is generally quicker than dial-up, it is still very slow compared to city based services. Even to ping Google takes one and a half seconds.

The inherent problems of latency with satellite services, means that it will never be able to provide "fast" Broadband.

Our own website www.grampiansnationalpark.com takes about 30 seconds to load via our 28k dial-up, 20seconds to load via our 1Mb satellite service, and in milliseconds via a 1Mb fibre optic service in Canada and England.

Optic Fibre can produce dramatic results, but it also has to provide capacity. The fibre optic capacity from

Horsham is limited, in that the system slows every afternoon. Horsham Color, a film and digital photographic service, employs 42 people, services clients throughout Australia and overseas, uses state of the art equipment, but has to post most of its finished product because it cannot be emailed satisfactorily. The manager is unsure for how much longer he will be able to remain in Horsham. We do not have the capacity to meet existing needs and must ensure that we build in capacity for future expansion, not just be trying to catch up.

There are many exchanges across Australia still on the Pair Gain System and as consequence they are unable to provide any Broadband service capability from the exchange. Thus the planned "Fibre to the Node" is not a solution for these exchanges.

We strongly believe that satellite is not a solution for us as it is inherently slow because of latency. For our local Laharum Exchange, with it's antiquated Pair Gain System, and for all those similar exchanges across the country, the only real solution is "Fibre to the Home".

We must not be planning just for "catch up", but for the future. The Rudd Government has promised to provide schools with "Fast Broadband". Imagine the frustration of high school students in Regional areas, travelling home by bus, knowing that they only have a very slow internet connection at home, where most of their study time takes place.

Regional Australia has many multi-million dollar businesses, generating billions of dollars of income for the country. The cost of providing Fibre to the Home is pocket money compared to the productivity gains that would immediately be evident. Overseas there are numerous examples of corporations moving out of the cities to set up in regional areas. They are doing this to take advantage of lower building costs for them and staff, work in more pleasant surroundings and become more competitive. It is only possible when they have very fast internet access.

No where in western Victoria can be considered remote. In today's society and current technology we have every right to expect comparable city services.

Yours sincerely

Royce & Jeanne Raleigh

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