



Australian Government

Department of Communications and the Arts

Our Reference: MC17-118808

Mr Steve Donkers
Secretary
Numeralla and District Activities Incorporated
numeralladainc@gmail.com

Dear Mr Donkers

Mobile Black Spot Program - Numeralla, NSW

Thank you for your email of 8 and 28 June, and 16 July 2017, to Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Minister for Communications and the Arts and Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Minister for Regional Communications, regarding the proposed mobile base station at Numeralla, NSW under the Australian Government's Mobile Black Spot Program (the program). As the matter raised falls within the portfolio responsibility of the Minister for Regional Communications, all correspondence has been referred to Minister Nash and I am responding on her behalf.

I note that Mr Chris Drew from the Department of Communications and the Arts (the Department) and I spoke to you by phone, on 5 June and 10 July 2017 respectively, in relation to this matter. The Secretary of the Department has also responded in writing (by email) to Ms Martina Donkers on 7 July 2017. I understand that a copy of that response was provided to you by Ms Donkers.

I note your concern regarding the proposed location of the Numeralla mobile base station. I am also aware and acknowledge that a number of people within the community have raised similar concerns and supported a Numeralla and District Activities Incorporated (NDAI) petition on Change.org. As you have written on behalf of the NDAI, representing the interests of the local community, I intend to provide a copy of this response to other community members who have written to the Government on this matter.

As you are aware, Numeralla is included on the *Database of Reported Public Mobile Black Spot Locations*. The Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) were required to select locations from this database in the applications they put forward for funding under rounds 1 and 2 of the program. In selecting locations the operators considered a range of factors, including the type of local terrain, environmental issues, obtaining local government planning approval and landowner agreement where necessary, having access to existing infrastructure, power and backhaul, and cost.

The MNOs were also required to address the assessment criteria specified in the program guidelines, including the cost to the Commonwealth. This cost has a direct impact on the number of locations across regional Australia, including Numeralla, which could receive funding and improved mobile coverage through the Government's investment. Base stations were assessed on a base station to base station comparison in order to maximise the value for money achieved under the program.

Seems we got a lot less than other sites that must have got a lot more based on published average \$ funding

It is important to note that the funding agreements with the MNOs include specific coverage outcomes required at the successfully funded locations specified in the agreements. Telstra is obliged to meet its coverage outcomes under the agreement.

Telstra are only interested in meeting contract specs, its what they get paid for

I can confirm that, at this time, Telstra is proceeding with delivering the Numeralla base station as originally proposed by mid-2018. Telstra has advised that it is still working through the process of assessing the options for the site location including seeking the required land access and development application approvals.

Telstra have advised that only 2 sites are now being considered, new tower on the existing exchange or NBN tower

Once complete, the Numeralla base station will deliver Telstra's 3G and state of the art 4GX mobile data services to a large part of the region for the first time, where there is currently poor or no existing coverage.

'large' is an interesting term to use in this context

I am also pleased to advise that there is further new mobile coverage in the region being funded under the program from base stations to be delivered by Telstra at both Avonside and Dalgety. These base stations are due for completion in the third quarter of 2017 and first half of 2018 respectively, and will supplement the Numeralla base station in providing improved mobile coverage to the broader region.

but not any of the Numeralla District

Hangman's Hill

I acknowledge that you have undertaken your own cost estimates of a Hangman's Hill solution, including an independent analysis of predictive coverage from this location. However, as we discussed by phone on 10 July 2017, in identifying a suitable site Telstra has undergone a rigorous engineering analysis. Telstra's analysis indicates its proposed site will best meet the coverage objectives of the program, within the allocated budget.

as defined by the Dept, which is to serve the village, not District as originally inferred in announcement

Telstra advised that it has been consulting closely with the community regarding a site for the new mobile base station and its analysis of the Hangman's Hill location found it would not allow it to fulfil its contractual obligations with the Federal and State Governments.

how it doesn't meet the contract has not been explained, and 'consultation' has been negligible, so a matter of opinion some in the village precinct will miss out if Hangman utilised, many more in the District miss out if its in the village

While locations with a higher elevation, such as Hangman's Hill, may appear to offer a good solution for improved mobile coverage to an area, there are many other factors, as noted above, that need to be considered by MNOs when deploying infrastructure. The increased costs to relocate to Hangman's Hill are not limited to just providing power to the site, but also include additional infrastructure costs associated with tower construction at the site, technical requirements and the provision of suitable backhaul.

Telstra have verbally indicated the Hangman is a good/great site, but have insufficient budget for it, and asked us for \$500k

Relocating the base station would be at significant incremental cost and also be to the detriment of the currently planned coverage and service outcomes to the community.

some winners and a lot more losers, no one site solution can connect to everyone, the Hangman connects to a far larger no.

Telstra's has stated that its overriding objective in participating in the program is to maximise new mobile coverage across regional Australia, including to communities such as Numeralla.

Telstra's overriding objective is shareholder returns, its a private company, and wouldn't be doing any of this without Govt \$s

Communications in an emergency

I note in particular the concerns raised by the community that residents won't have access to mobile communications in the event there is a bushfire or an emergency in the district. As part of effective emergency preparation and planning it is strongly recommended that people do not rely on a single form of communication or source of information during an emergency. Even in areas where mobile coverage is available any communication system can be temporarily affected by adverse conditions despite best planning and preparation.

During an emergency situation, people should use a range of information sources to stay aware of local conditions such as local radio, television and state and territory emergency service websites. For example, during emergency situations people can listen to ABC Local Radio to receive up-to-date warnings. A portable transistor radio with a spare set of batteries can provide a valuable backup in the event there is a loss of mains power.

we have continuously stated that local ABC radio is not available for most in the District

It is important to realise that if living, working or travelling in areas where there is poor or no mobile coverage alternative devices, such as low cost satellite personal location beacons (PLBs) and/or satellite phones, should be considered. These devices are readily available from a number of providers and can operate across the entire Australian landmass. Satellite phones are available from \$700, and plans start from \$15 a month.

The Department contacted the ABC for advice on ABC local radio services in the Numeralla area. The ABC advised that Numeralla sits just outside the transmitter's coverage area. However, there are a range of options to listen to ABC Local Radio, or alternatively increasing the reliability of reception from distant transmitters:

- The use of an external AM Loop antenna with a low noise amplifier mounted on the roof of the house will significantly improve the possibility of reliable AM radio reception. The ABC, however, suggests consulting with a local expert reception technician for advice before proceeding down this path.
but a battery powered radio is recommended in case of no power
- ABC radio services are available (subscription free) on the VAST satellite service. Once installed there are no ongoing monthly charges. More information on this can be found at www.abc.net.au/reception/services/vast.htm.
and no local radio

Information and radio reception advice can also be found on the ACMA's radio advice website page at www.acma.gov.au/Citizen/TV-Radio/Radio.

Further information about the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at www.communications.gov.au/mobile_coverage.

Thank you for taking the time to write to the Ministers on this matter. I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Lachlann Paterson
Assistant Secretary
Regional Deployment

28 July 2017