Friday, October 26, 2007
Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities.
Parliament House
Macquarie St.,
Sydney 2000

We would like to submit this letter to the Committee in the hope that a reasonable solution may be found for the 2% of people that have fallen through the net and have been left with virtually no service.

We are situated approximately 14 Km north of Orange in the Central West. The terrain is very hilly and we have been informed by Telstra representatives after they conducted tests on our property that we are in a black spot and not to expect any form of mobile service now or in the foreseeable future.

We have a Telstra landline and ISDN dial-up internet. We have both digital and CDMA handsets but do not receive either service at home. We have tried a number of Next G handsets as well as a fixed (mains powered) Next G modem connected to an external high gain antenna, all to no avail. The antenna was supplied by Maxom who also manufacture the modems for Telstra.

In 2006 we applied for and expected to receive a wireless broadband service from a local provider, Cirrus Communications. This entailed erecting extra towers in the area and with only weeks to go, the HiBIS subsidy scheme was suddenly cancelled and Cirrus just walked away without even a phone call to tell us what was happening. They still service the Orange CBD.

We have recently discovered that the technology to help us has been available since 2005. Telstra have tested, approved and were going to implement a system to extend the range of ADSL from the exchange. The system was developed by the Melbourne IT company Extel Communications and was known as Longline ADSL.

As covered in the accompanying article by Stuart Corner, it appears that the system has been used in limited applications but has been not been fully implemented purely for commercial reasons. The inferior, more costly, and in our case unavailable, Next G broadband is being pushed without any concern for those that are adversely affected by the decision not to proceed with the Longline system.

In our view, even commercially, this does not make a great deal of sense as we will still have to purchase a Next G handset to replace our CDMA handset and would subscribe to broadband if it were available. Extel are still marketing the system under the name Expandsl and we believe it still may be the only acceptable answer to our problem.

Extel may be contacted at www.extel.com.au/products_solutions/expandsl/index

We have enclosed an extract of the article by telecommunication journalist Stuart Corner.
Mr Corner's article may be found at www.itwire.com/content/view/13983/1095

Kerry & Carol Guerin

Contributed by Stuart Corner. Monday, 13 August 2007

Go to Telstra's web site and trawl through its press releases for January 2005 and you will find a gap between number 21, issued 25 January, and number 23, issued 28 January. Subsequent developments suggest this was no accident but an Orwellian excision by Telstra of information it no longer wanted in the public domain. I religiously retain all source information so I can tell you exactly what was in Telstra press release number 22 of 2005. It was headed "Telstra trial takes ADSL broadband to new lengths." Here is what it said.

"Telstra today announced it is trialling an innovative new device that will significantly increase the transmission limits of ADSL broadband from an enabled Telstra exchange...The three-month trial involves the use of electronic 'booster' equipment, which is located near the end of the current transmission limit. The equipment can increase the signal by up to 20 kilometres from an ADSL-enabled telephone exchange...The trial will help Telstra assess if it is technically and commercially feasible to use the device more widely."

So did the device not pass muster? Far from it. In June 2005 the then head of Telstra Country Wide, Doug Campbell, told the National Farmers Federation: "We have also conducted a trial of a new booster device developed by a local IT company, Extel, that provides transmission to up to approximately 20km from an ADSL-enabled exchange. Following a successful trial, we are about to commence use at several pilot sites, with a view, I can announce today, to making it commercially available in September to HiBIS-eligible customers. It is a small device suited to rural application."

That was before Trujillo and before Next G. Post Trujillo the story changed dramatically. In May 2006, the Australian Financial Review reported that "[Telstra] will not proceed with a plan announced last year to extend broadband to homes and farms outside country towns, amid concerns it would be forced to allow its rivals to use the new connections...Telstra executives told the project's technology supplier, Extel Communications, last week they would connect only a fraction of the households originally planned. The decision means Melbourne-based Extel is likely to shut down its main production line and issue staff with redundancy notices."

According to the AFR, "Campbell sought to fit the boosters to hundreds of exchanges but his plan was vetoed by Telstra chief executive Sol Trujillo as part of a cost-cutting drive. About 60 boosters have been installed in exchanges but another 200 have been stored in warehouses. Telstra agreed in principle last week to deploy hundreds of the devices rather than the thousands first planned, according to one person familiar with the project. But another said the accord might still be jeopardised because Country Wide must seek approval from Mr Trujillo's inner circle before embarking on new projects...It is also weighing up whether it would be better to promote its planned 3G wireless network in outlying areas."

Well, its one thing to can a technology rollout for sound commercial, regulatory or even technical reasons but when references to the original announcement are removed you have to be suspicious.

According to T4, the carrier group set up to lobby against what it sees as a concerted campaign of misinformation by Telstra, "The problem for Telstra is that Long Line ADSL [Telstra's name for services delivered via the Extel technology] is much cheaper than its Next G network. Telstra can make much more money by convincing customers that Next G is the best option, when in fact it is not.

Telstra has in fact been perpetuating the myth of Next G as a universal broadband service ever since its launch in October 2006. After attending that event - quite innocent of prejudice in this regard, I wrote : "Listening to the presentation and knowing no better you would have thought the service the answer to the prayers of every rural Australian beyond the reach of ADSL, which of course it isn't...Technically, Next G certainly can bring broadband to almost all Australians but economically, no way. Just a small issue of price. But that was not mentioned anywhere in the presentation, and such information was hard to find."

According to T4 this week, "Telstra's Next G network an expensive alternative to fixed broadband service. To use Telstra's Next G network in the same way broadband is commonly used, you would have to be prepared to pay a very hefty premium of $185 per month."