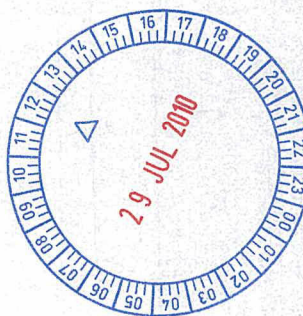


Hon Wendy Duncan MLC

Member for Mining & Pastoral Region | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Regional Development; Lands | Parliamentary Leader in the Legislative Council

21 July 2010



Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and
Public Affairs
Parliament House
Harvest Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis

Re: Submission- Petition no 70, inadequate mobile telephone coverage in the Eyre region

I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the petition relating to inadequate mobile telephone coverage in the Eyre region

The petition is in response to concern raised to me, and my Esperance electorate office, regarding the unreliable mobile phone coverage along the Eyre Highway.

Reliable communications are essential for emergency services, transport operators, residents and tourists to travel and enjoy the iconic Eyre Highway and Eyre region. Lack of mobile phone service can mean if accidents, or problems are experienced by people using the highway it can be a number of hours or more before assistance is given. Better coverage will mean that not only could assistance be called for, but that basic instructions/assistance will be relayed while the person is waiting for help to arrive.

Better coverage will provide some form of security for all those using these long stretches of road. Many tourists are older and less capable of handling the situations that arise on the highways, often because they are not use to, or ill prepared for, the travel they are taking and the environments they are entering.

One example of such an incident comes from Eucla police who in July happened to come across a road accident 160km west of Eucla. A women in her seventies had run off the road and travelled through a fence and was entangled in the wire fencing. Police say there is no mobile coverage in the area and if the women needed to make contact for help, she would not have been able to.

I travelled the Eyre Highway myself in April and came upon a couple whose car had broken down. I transported them to the next emergency phone location on the highway only to find that it was out of order. I then transported them 120km to Balladonia where they were able to use a public phone to get assistance with their vehicle. This long saga would have been avoided if there had been adequate mobile phone coverage on the highway.

Police also rely on the TADIS information system which allows them to apprehend and detect offenders, assist with community safety and provides safety for officers. While police agree this system is valuable it relies on mobile coverage.



Mobile phone coverage is required on the Eyre Highway east of Norseman as far as Eucla on the West Australian-South Australian border, a distance of about 700 kilometres. There are estimated to be just over 110,000 vehicle movements per year across the Nullarbor. As well as tourism, this segment of highway carries road transport between Perth and the Eastern States.

I acknowledge that the reason there has not been satisfactory mobile coverage up to now is that major carriers have argued that there is no business case to provide the service and infrastructure and is therefore commercially not viable for these carriers.

Therefore, there is a need for a community service component which under the Royalties for Regions initiative has seen an investment of \$120 million over the next three years in the state budget to regional communications. The program will incorporate an \$80 million initiative to upgrade communications systems for regional police and emergency services. We ask that the Eyre Highway is listed as a priority for funding under this \$120m investment which will see the broader users also benefiting from having a reliable and essential mobile phone service.

This issue has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

Yours sincerely



Hon Wendy Duncan MLC

Member for Mining and Pastoral

Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Regional Development