

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Australia

**Answers to questions on notice: Inquiry into the Telecommunications
Amendment (Mobile Phone Towers) Bill 2011**

Additional question on notice from Senator McKenzie:

What do you feel is the personal impact of your community activism? Have your efforts been worthwhile?

The first part of this question is answered in my earlier responses to questions on notice.

In respect to the second part, it is very difficult to consider that all the work is worth it while both the regulations and the attitude of the regulators remain as skewed towards industry as they are. Even those communities that do force carriers to reassess (and this is never voluntary, it is usually a function of the quantum of negative press and/or legal action), find other carriers engaging in the same behaviours shortly after or the same carrier returning months later for the same, or an equally unsuitable, spot.

Taroona is an example. Optus and Telstra proposed a location next to the childcare centre. Discussion and press coverage on the poor site choice was extensive, however less than a year later Vodafone lodged a development application with Council for a site nearby to the community's school. It is inconceivable Vodafone were unaware of the previous siting battle.

By choosing poor sites back to back, carriers claim communities are unreasonable when rejecting them, when this is clearly not the case. It is an approach that seems to strive to deliberately divide communities. Currently, there is no incentive for carriers to work with communities and improve site selection.

The situation in Sandy Bay is similar. A large community campaign ultimately forced both carriers to withdraw (8 months after we started). We are now four months on and still face poor communication, uncertainty and the flagging of potential sites on the buildings next door to the original site!

I have included these examples to demonstrate just how long these battles go on for for communities, and the lack of positive impact on industry conduct.

It is frustrating, after all the work put in to explaining the community's position to hear the same tired "solutions" trotted out:

- The community just needs to be better educated (the "risk communication" theory);
- The next version of the ACIF Code will fix it (it won't);

And the equally tired excuses that just aren't true:

- Communities are confused;

Communities are not confused but frustrated by industry conduct and the lack of regulation and monitoring.

- Communities don't want towers at all; and by extension
- Communities are denying their communities services.

This excuse is quite untrue. Communities are actually asking for careful siting and community input in this process. It is a far cry from saying they don't want towers at all. Communities are mindful that towers expand over time unchecked and that this impacts visual amenity and EMR outputs. Communities are also aware of the lack of long term health data. We want a true precautionary approach.

It has been worthwhile to at least get a hearing at the Senate Committee, something the lower house committee did not bother doing. It was extremely disappointing, and reflective of the overall attitude, that the testimony of the regulators showed what little effort they put into understanding the issues we have raised, and equally disheartening to see the regulators and industry representatives conferring between and even during sessions.

The issues communities have raised are not new but long standing. They are issues that have been assiduously raised with parliament by all sides of politics, and also with industry, for many years.

The mammoth effort and toll of hundreds of community battles, would be all worthwhile and not lost if the parliament undertook to finally act, and fixed the broken legislation.