

***Inquiry into Telecommunications Amendment (Mobile Phone Towers) Bill 2012
Public hearing in Canberra on Thursday 12 April 2012***

Question on notice: “Senator MCKENZIE: *What do you feel is the personal impact of your community activism? Have your efforts been worthwhile?*”

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to detail the effect on the community of Telstra’s proposal to place a mobile phone base station near Rainworth State School in terms of Local and National activities, and an assessment as to their effectiveness.

Background

No Towers Near Schools (NTNS) campaign was triggered in response to a proposed mobile phone base station in Bardon, Brisbane. NTNS community activism has had a financial, time, physical and social impact on members of the community.

NTNS has managed two campaigns; the local (Bardon base station), and a national (NTNS web site, ACIF Code review, EMERG, Submissions for Legislative review...) campaigns

Local Activities: The following timeline summarises the key milestones over the 27 months taken from consultation to commissioning Telstra’s Bardon base station.

- i. 04 September 2009: Telstra commenced community consultation to construct a mobile phone base station at 27 Gerler Street, Bardon.
- ii. 31 March 2010 the body corporate commissioner ruled that Telstra did not have a valid lease at 27 Gerler Street.
- iii. 23 June 2010 Telstra commenced consultation to construct a revised, 3-tower proposal.
- iv. 02 December 2011 Optus contact NTNS indicating their intention to construct a base station(s) in Bardon
- v. 05 December 2011 the 3-tower proposal is operational, and previous facility decommissioned, delayed following the Queensland floods

The extent of community involvement varied over this period, for example, the cost was greatest at times when deadlines for submissions, briefings, newsletters etc needed to be met. The greatest commitment, which was constant, was for 9 months, between September 2009 and May 2010.

National Activities: NTNS has also undertaken the following national activities

- i. November 2009: Launched NTNS web site, which has since received 96 initial requests for help and assistance from many communities across Australia. Ongoing assistance is often sought by these communities. We estimate NTNS commits 4-8 hours per community.
- ii. September 2010: Submission to the ACMA’s “reconnecting with the customer” review
- iii. November 2010 to December 2011: community representative on the ACIF code review, which included formal submissions, 16 committee meetings of typically 4 hours each, with several all-day meetings in Sydney, and actions following the meetings

- iv. August 2011 to date: community representative on ARPANSA's Electromagnetic energy reference group (EMERG) which meets twice a year
- v. November 2011: submission to the House of Representatives telecommunications bill amendment
- vi. March 2012: submission to the Senate telecommunications bill amendment

The extent of community involvement on National issues has been constant since September 2009 to date.

The following table summarises the average NTNS commitment for local and national issues

Cost	Local (Sept 09 – Dec 2011)	National (Sept 09 to date)
Time	<p>Approx 210 hours per week.</p> <p>This includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weekly meetings (Sep 09 to May 10) • Fortnightly meetings (May 10 to Dec 11) • researching, writing, printing and distribution of newsletters to residents within 500m radius of school • Constructing and maintaining NTNS website • Researching, gathering information and data; Reading and understanding: proposal, Federal Legislation, Industry (ACIF) Code • Correspondence with Carriers, elected representatives, Government Agencies, Scientists • Meetings with Local, State and Federal Representatives. Carriers, and DBCDE • Organising/attending community meetings • Working with media agencies • Following up on correspondence 	<p>Approx 100 hours per week. This includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone and email communication with communities nationally. • Answering requests for help from other communities • Formulating NTNS Fact sheets • Updating NTNS website • Updating national data base of communities • Biweekly meetings (weekly when needed). • Researching, gathering information and data; • Accessing RFNSA Site. • Writing submissions ACIF Code Review, House of Representatives Inquiry, Senate Inquiry • Letter writing to elected representatives, Government Agencies, Scientists • Meeting with State and Federal Representatives (Representatives and Senators). • Following up on correspondence • Member of ACIF Code review committee • Member of EMERG • Attending Senate Inquiry
Comment:	<p>Members often express that the time cost of such community activism is akin to having a second job.</p> <p>Work is typically done from the hours of 8pm-12 midnight, with this time extended during periods of high demand e.g. closing date for submissions. All of this is done in addition to full-time employment be it paid or unpaid.</p> <p>Whilst expenses to attend Senate hearing, EMERG and ACIF code meetings are paid at cost, time must be taken as annual leave from their full time employer.</p> <p>Both Long Service Leave and Annual Leave were used to assist both the local and national campaigns.</p>	
Financial	<p>\$20 000 +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal fees (alone \$20 000) • Portion of Long Service Leave • Community donations 	<p>Approx \$5000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office expenses (phone calls, photocopying) • Portion Annual Leave
Comment:	<p>The financial cost to the community has been enormous. Monies raised were needed to assist with legal fees. Other expenses were met at a personal cost to community members. Including, stickers, banners, signs, sausages, drinks, ribbons, paper, and services including web design etc. to assist the local campaign.</p>	
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to family, professional & social life. • Sleep deprivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption to family, professional & social life. • Sleep deprivation
Comment:	<p>The period of the local proposal (approx. 2 years) was a most intense and draining experience. It proved to be very disruptive for many in the community. As a community member you were always on your guard, apprehensive about what may be happening. We continue feeling this as we await notification of future developments.</p>	
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical fatigue • Stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical fatigue • Stress
Comment:	<p>Our activism has been exhaustive and challenging.</p>	

On a local level, NTNS has undertaken full and open consultation from the very outset. Much of the cost to the community (and to all parties) could have been substantially reduced if the Carrier had engaged with the community from the start.

Phone companies have an extensive revenue streams to fight communities, and lobby state and federal government, a strategy that often results in communities folding, as they are unable to equal the carriers expenditure. In addition, all costs incurred by the carrier, including staff time, legal fees, consultant fees are off set against their company tax liability.

Communities often operate with \$0 budget, and unlike the Carriers, all costs and time “lie where they fall”, with no revenue stream, nor an ability to offset costs against taxable income.

Have your efforts been worthwhile?

We believe so, for several reasons, detailed below:

The personal cost to members of our community has been very high, but the only other alternative was to give up. Whilst the scientific evidence relating to the health effects of EMR is inconclusive, the cost of having to live with that decision would have been very substantial – in fact, you cannot measure it.

Our community is now more connected. People engage with others as they drive past or at the bus stop, and people stop to have a chat. The relationships we now have are stronger, united and well organised and we are ready, should we ever be confronted with a similar situation in the future.

At a national level we are able to contribute to the national debate and procedures, having experienced “the process” first hand.

We are also able to provide independent advice to other communities who are often overawed in the first instance and unaware of their rights and actions they can undertake.