

Reply to Senator Mackenzie's question on notice:

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

Communities have had to fight tooth and nail to be heard by Telcos and our community has suffered. We live in a small country town and our community much like any other, is made up of young families, business owners, professionals and retirees. And like any other community we also have a number of residents with serious illnesses who struggle daily. We were united in our struggle against Optus and were all affected.

Our community worked long hours fighting to have the towers re-located to somewhere the whole community and Optus could all be happy with. We couldn't take time off work and those that suffered most were our families who struggled along whilst the community group worked around the clock.

For two years my husband ran our family life and social activities stopped. Our community was tipped on its head.

We had learnt new skills on the fly. Learn to read and understand regulations, become media experts and lastly, learn a new language- Optus speak! The exhaustion was extreme and it was demoralising to keep working so hard when every door slammed shut and Optus continued to ignore us.

The stress hasn't stopped now the towers are operating and we live day after day right under them not knowing the long term impact. Neighbours worry about more panels being added down the track that we and Council would be powerless to stop. Most people cannot afford to move. One resident very close to the tower who has no way of moving has become extremely depressed.

Mobile phones are a ubiquitous part of modern life. But towers should be built carefully and EMR treated with respect. Telcos should build with particular care and not a devil may care attitude and Government has a strong role in making sure this happens. None of us want to look back and regret we weren't more prudent.

Our community were derided when we stated our concerns about poor consultation and the possibility of long term health problems if we lived under towers long term. EMR we were told was very safe and were told to check the ARPANSA and ACMA websites to reassure us. I hope the Committee too will look closely at our community photos that show towers just metres from our homes. There is nothing to stop this happening again. It has ruined the peace and tranquillity of our family life. The playground opposite that was once a hive of activity is empty and quiet. The children have stopped playing there and anyone who can afford to is looking to move. But while those who can think of moving out the rats have moved in, very much at home in the long grass nobody mows around the Telco rented water tank site.

We are a well educated community and have not made our decision from some poorly informed outpost. Our community group includes a research scientist, ex-school Principal, an academic, successful local business owners and law student among others. We were not confused as the Committee in the lower house wrote after looking at Andrew Wilkie's bill. We know our consultation fell well short. And we understand that the ARPANSA electromagnetic radiation exposure standard is too high and towers are not checked. We have a right to feel deeply concerned when Optus told us we would live with towers so impossibly close to our homes.

Telcos may say we are ill-informed and misunderstand but we are not hysterical or ill educated. We have well founded concerns about the poor regulations and how they've left us stranded and the Telcos unaccountable. Despite our loss at Lennox Heads it is not a fight we regret. But it is a fight we should not have had to have.

The towers in our street are a daily reminder of all that is wrong with the Telco regulations. Our community is precious to us and we hope our fight is not in vain, that this bill means Government will review tower regulations so that other communities can avoid suffering the same fate ours has in the future.