

11-11-2011

The Committee Secretary
The [House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications](#)
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600
Sent by email

Dear Committee Members,

As a community member who has been involved in supporting the Rainworth/Bardon community in response to a Telstra mobile phone base station proposal, I welcome the opportunity to support the amendments proposed by Andrew Wilkie to enhance community consultation. This is something from my own experience which I feel is very much needed.

I also wish to recommend the following:

1. That the issue of cumulative EMR (Electromagnetic Radiation) and the levels emitted from such telecommunication facilities be reduced to the lowest level possible, having regard to worlds best practice. The possible adverse health effects of EMR are of great concern to me, in particular the impact on young children in communities. Until such time that this type of technology is without doubt proven to be safe a precautionary approach must be taken. I am aware that certain European communities are currently trialling such facilities at greatly reduced EMR levels to what is used in Australia and I ask **why we can't revise our power levels down?**
2. Where a Carrier presents to the community technical data e.g. Industry EME Reports to support their various proposals, the community be provided with an opportunity to engage an independent source (of their choosing) at the Carrier's expense, to enable the community to understand the implications and validity of the given data.
3. Everything in writing – this is to ensure that all information is clearly identified and if changes are made, such information remains accurate and thus can be easily provided to others and everyone is reading identical material.
4. Glossary of terms – common understanding of the meaning of different words and terms e.g., what is meant by 'consultation', 'consideration' and 'having regard to'...etc etc.

Background information:

I feel certain from what I have read that many of our federal members of Parliament are only too well aware of the need for substantial review of the provisions of community consultation in relation to the siting and operation of telecommunication base stations. In support of this need I wish to outline my experience as a very near neighbour to a proposed site, chosen by Telstra in 2008 for a low impact facility at 27 Gerler Street, Rainworth 4065. In early September 2009 I received advice on behalf of Telstra concerning this proposal. And at the same time a sign was placed adjacent to the proposed site (about 10 – 12 metres from my home) which in the third paragraph under the heading 'Telstra Proposal....' (undated but with a reference to comment to be made by 22 September 2009) included the following:

"Telstra is consulting with Brisbane City Council, Councillors, Members of Parliament and nearby residents to ensure that the views of the community are taken into consideration before making a decision."

With the benefit of hindsight, I now know that the agreement allegedly reached with the owners of the site had in fact been reached months earlier or at least Telstra thought it had and the local community was now being roped into a charade under the guise of 'consulting' and 'consider' when in simple terms, it was a fait accompli.

But that is with the benefit of hindsight.

The community held some quite large meetings, including with Telstra representatives and in the process advanced some alternative proposals. These were all then dismissed by Telstra and this is confirmed by Telstra CEO Mr Thodey in a letter to Senator Ludlam, dated 3 November 2009, in which he states '...Telstra will not be considering an alternative site.' A comment very supportive of a fait accompli but not very supportive of consultation etc.

One quite serious concern (at least to me) emerged during this time and that was the issue of Telstra verbally advising of their power to enter upon the property in question or any property for that matter and compulsorily carry out all the work and then deny any compensation. This was an item fairly frequently and cleverly put about by Telstra but never in writing. It was of course designed to use fear as a tactic. There is clearly a need to include in relevant legislation that all matters of substance or concern to any party be identified in writing by the Carrier/Agent or the community involved. And that any failure to commit a matter to writing, be identified by the aggrieved party and notice of the failure given to the other party and or an independent body as a matter of record.

My greatest concern however, was the blatant rejection by Telstra Representatives of the ideas, suggestions and concerns raised by the then Federal Members for Ryan and Brisbane – Mr Michael Johnson and Mr Arch Bevis respectively (the electorate boundary then ran through the local area) as well as State MP Mr Andrew Fraser and Councillor Peter Matic. These Gentlemen at that time by and large were held in high esteem as properly elected representatives. And the rejection of their repeated suggestions for genuine community consultation was something I would have found hard to believe had I not seen and heard it for myself. One alarming matter concerned an RF Map for the adjacent dwelling outlining the danger zones spreading from the proposed facility. This was a normal suburban home and this Map showed the red zone (no access within this zone **for anyone** because of radiation effects) and yellow zone (very limited access, **for technicians only**) right up to their side wall. Mr Bevis was particularly concerned about this but the best response he could get was a revised map withdrawing the zone outlines back to the fence line. As though the emissions would somehow know not to cross the fence line. Laughable but **deadly serious**. The obvious dangers inherent in this proposal seemed of little concern to Telstra.

The Rainworth/Bardon community worked very hard indeed in the overall battle and it is well documented for all to see. Including raising in excess of \$20,000 to support its case. However it is with the benefit of hindsight crystal clear that no matter what was said and or done by the community, the outcome expected by Telstra was clearly to its benefit. The community carry on was normal, the protests expected and so on but fate intervened in the form of a less than valid lease. Of course without the community pressure, this may not have been so easily identified – we will never know. Telstra however knew early in October there was/would be an issue at some point and thus it was. This reality is to be contrasted with the current Telstra website statement which is in the following terms: "... (the Gerler Street proposal)...this proposal attracted significant community feedback and opposition. In response to the community's feedback, Telstra now proposes a revised solution...". Is this consultation, consideration or merely maintaining the image of? It really is a case of Telstra being more than generous to itself with this sort of statement and using every opportunity to push their line of "community consultation" - it is not and I doubt it ever has been.

Telstra then agreed to work with the community but only because the matter could go no further otherwise. I have had no other experience with any other Carrier and have no knowledge of their methods but in so far as Telstra is concerned, my experience clearly shows a very lopsided position for a community in trying to be an equal party in discussing, considering and appreciating all relevant matters involved. There is clearly a need for a GLOSSARY of terms to be included for parties to understand and appreciate the meaning of words etc. As earlier mentioned EVERYTHING of substance relevant to a proposed siting of a base station must be in writing with a protection of recording any refusal by one party for such a record. This would especially cover the tactic of threatening to compulsorily move onto the property in question.

Yours faithfully,

Robert E Tredenick