

18th March 2017

Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee

The Rollout of National Broadband Network

Introduction

I would like to start by introducing myself, Gary Jackson, 55 years of age and a retired Police Officer. This submission will detail information about my home NBN service and my experiences over the past 4 years.

The NBN was connected to my residence at Pt Frederick on 27th August 2013 with fibre to the house.

There were no issues associated with the initial NBN connection what so ever.

Our NBN plan was for a basic Telstra Home bundle with a download speed of 12Mbs per second.

As far as data usage at our residence goes, we are a family of 4, two adults and two children who were undertaking the HSC and are now studying at University. I don't believe our data usage was large but with the children studying for the HSC, there was consistent usage.

During the first 2 year of NBN service we had what we thought was normal connection. There were the occasional call dropouts and some noise on the line but we believed this to be normal.

In late 2015, my wife and daughter were in the final stages of organising an overseas holiday for a period of 8 weeks and had to arrange and book flights and accommodation via the internet. Internet access was essential.

In 2016, my wife and I both had large community projects running and we were very reliant on our computers for these programs. Access to email and Facebook was a major part of the organisation of these two events.

My wife organised and coordinated "**Poppy Project: Never forgetting the Sacrifices**" which was an event which saw over 60,000 handmade poppies placed onto the Skillion at Terrigal haven. This event saw large numbers of community members and school students involved in a project which commemorated the ANZAC spirit and the events of World War 1. This was not just a large local event, this was an event that generated international media attention and saw members of the public travelling hundreds of kilometres to witness the results.

At the same time I was coordinating "**Youth In Performing Arts**" (YIPA) a series of variety concerts for young performers on the Central Coast. It involves auditioning of over 1,000 young persons and then organising a series of 4 variety concerts. Not only was this an annual event, I also had the added pressure of it being the 25th anniversary of Youth In Performing Arts with a variety of extra activities planned.

NBN Issues

In late November 2015, we noticed an increasing number of incidents where we lost connection to the NBN. The incidents began to increase in number until in December of 2015, I contacted Telstra to report that we were having an issue with our NBN connection.

A Telstra technician attended my residence and attempted to work out the problem with the NBN connection. Whilst he could not properly identify the nature of the problem with the service, he recommended that I purchase a new modem as soon as possible. He quoted \$250 for a new Telstra modem.

I was subsequently billed by Telstra for a service repair, \$120, even though the technician could not identify or fix the problem. I contacted Telstra and explained what had happened and they withdrew the service fee and also agreed to forward a new modem to my residence.

After the arrival of the new modem (Telstra model 799) in early January 2016, I installed the modem with the assistance of a Telstra Technician, over the phone. The new modem appeared to work well for a period of two weeks at which time the loss of connection to NBN recommenced.

This was again reported to Telstra who in turn escalated the report to Level 2 status.

**For me, it was unclear at this point in time who I was talking to, I had rung Telstra and I did not know if I was talking to them or to NBN. This would later become easier to understand as I became more familiar with the processes.

Throughout January and February 2016, there was little to no reaction to my previous fault report. I made a number of calls to Telstra / NBN to try and resolve the issue but there was little to no reaction from them.

Since the time of initially reporting the NBN issue to early March 2016, I would continually have to reset both the modem and NBN box to re-establish connection to the NBN. This was something I had not difficulty with but I imagine that an elderly person having the same or similar problem would struggle to cope with the technology.

In early March 2016, after a technician failed to attend for a prearranged appointment at my home, I made my first official complaint to Telstra about my NBN service.

The day after lodging my complaint, I had to ring Telstra once again to advised of further issues with my NBN connection. I was advised that my previous case file had been closed off and they no longer had a fault report on my home service.

There a number of things that happened on the 10/3/16. Firstly, I was contacted by a Telstra employee from Newcastle who had been assigned by case file. Our initial conversations were positive and he assured me that an NBN Technician would attend my home to address the problem ASAP. Secondly, shortly after this call, I had to contact Telstra Billing Department as we had not received an invoice for February 2016. At this time I requested that my account be re-credited for the period December 2015 to January 2015 due to the poor level of service provided. Thirdly, an NBN technician attended and recorded a poor signal to my internal NBN Box (-26). Upon speaking with his call/Service centre, the technician was advised to replace the NBN box completely. A number of test calls were made whilst the technician was in attendance with adjustments having to be made before a clear signal was established. After the technician left, the service failed once again.

Further calls were made to Telstra / NBN and after speaking to several different people about the issues, the complaint was escalated to NSOC level.

On the 11/3/16, the service was so bad that I had to resort to using an Ethernet cable directly from the NBN box to my computer to get a reliable service. Whilst this was fine for my computer, none of my family could use the internet due to a lack of Wi-fi connection.

On 15/3/16, I tried to contact my new complaint manager from 10/3/16 but he did not return my calls or respond to my messages. It was at this point in time that I first made contact with the office of The Telecommunications Ombudsman. I lodged an on-line complaint and received a complaint number

Due to further issues with service connection resulting in a total loss of internet connection on 16/3/16, I again contacted Telstra / NBN and was advised that my case file had been closed off once again.

Also, during the early part of March 2016, I realised that I was unable to properly address this issue on my own so I decided to make representations to my local politicians and Senior Executive personnel with Telstra. I attended the office of Senator Deborah O'Neill and one of her staff recorded the issues associated with my NBN service. This meeting resulted in the Telstra Complaint officer from Newcastle contacting me on 10/3/16.

A wrote to Mr Andy Ellis, Head of Customer Service for Telstra Australia. That letter was dated 6th March 2016. I did not receive any form of acknowledgement to this letter.

I contacted the office of the Member for Robertson, Lucy Wicks MP. I spoke to a male who took details of my NBN issues. That was at 10.12am on 11th March, 2016. I was later advised by a member of the local media that Lucy Wicks' office had no record of my complaint.

I again contacted the office of Lucy Wicks 12.45pm on 18/3/16 and spoke to Taylor. He initially advised that he had no record of my call and then said that the systems were down and he was unable to check if I had called or not. At 1.15pm that day, Lucy Wicks personally contacted me and advised that an appointment had been made for a technician to attend my home the following Tuesday. That appointment was subsequently rescheduled.

On 23/3/16 two NBN technicians attended my home and replaced the power supply to the NBN and also by-passed the battery back-up system. It was also established that the modem was resetting itself, an issue for Telstra and not NBN.

In late March 2016, I was contacted by Christina, a complaint manager acting for NBN. Christina was in the Philippines and whilst she was polite, understanding and very cooperative, she lacked some knowledge of the NBN system in Australia and the capabilities of the senior technical services. This became more apparent as time went on.

On 29/3/16 a new Telstra Modem was installed. This resulted in a loss of phone connection for a period of time.

It was at this point in time that I was requested by NBN technicians to log outages/loss of connection for my NBN Service. This was something I had been doing myself for well over a month. I was able to supply them with the data that I had recorded. At some point further down the track, I questioned my complaint manager Christina about the ability of NBN to program their computer system to record outages associated with my NBN service. Christina told me that this was not possible with the current technology. I knew this to be incorrect and that programming would allow for all outages / loss of connection to be recorded by NBN and thus proper analysis of the faults.

Over the next month my lack of NBN service remained consistent and numerous calls were made to Telstra / NBN to reports faults. My Telstra modem was replaced twice during March 2016. (Telstra Modem 799 then 797).

On 27/4/16, a representative from Lucy Wicks' office contacted me to offer assistance. I declined the offer stating that I wanted her to be aware of the issue but that I had the matter in hand at that point in time. I have not heard from her or her office since that date.

During May 2016 I began to receive automated calls from Telstra about my overdue account. The issue of payment, whilst I was experiencing Service difficulties was yet to be resolved.

In May, whilst waiting for a NBN Complaint Officer to attend my address and speak to me, I was advised that NBN had identified an issue at the local exchange and AVC testing had to be carried out before anyone could attend my home.

I later spoke to my complaint manager who suggested that I purchase an “extender” or signal booster for the Wi-fi. I advised her that my computer was less than 30cms from the modem and I still couldn’t get a reliable signal so a booster certainly wasn’t going to make a difference.

On 13/5/16 the NBN download speed for my home was increased from 12mbs to 50mbs in an attempt to rectify the issue with loss of connection. In the following fortnight there was little to no problems experienced with the internet connection.

On 23/5/16 I spoke to my complaint manager Christina and it was agreed that the case file could be closed pending agreement on the financial side of this matter. Reimbursement of funds to me was part of that agreement. There was some pressure from the Case Manager to close the case file from her end.

Within 3 days of the case file being closed off there were further issues with service connection which required me to reset both the modem and NBN box on a regular basis. The issue was again reported to Telstra / NBN. Several days later a new modem was delivered and installed.

On 26/7/16 a new internal NBN box was fitted. Further issues were reported after this was done.

On 1/8/16, I was contacted by the Telecommunications Ombudsman who requested an update on the matter. The update was given.

On 3/8/16 I was contacted by a female named Narelle, a new complaint manager from Telstra. After discussing the issues associated with my NBN Service, **Narelle stated her opinion that it was not a Telstra issue and it had to be something localised to my residence. She indicated that Telstra could no longer assist me with this matter.** Prior to her finishing the call I questioned her on her qualifications to make such a decision. Did she have a Customer Service qualification; “YES”. Did she have any qualifications in Telecommunications, “NO”. I told her that she was not qualified to make the decision that she had and that I needed to speak to her supervisor.

Approximately 90 minutes later, Chris, Narelle’s supervisor rang me to discuss the case. Chris started off the call by talking about my data usage over the preceding 6 months and how it was excessive. I did not see the relevance of the data usage at all. We discussed the possibility of a localised issue affecting my NBN service. At this point in time Chris started describing my house. I assumed he was using Google maps “Streetview”. I found this point disturbing and unnecessary for the issues associated with my NBN Service.

Chris then switched to, "Perhaps there was something wrong with the computers and laptops being used within my home?" I explained that all the computers/laptops had been checked and were working fine. My son is studying Computer Science at UNSW and found problems with any computer equipment being used.

Chris again indicated that there was nothing further that could be done by Telstra to fix the issues associated with my NBN Service. He also said that from the evidence that he had he did not believe that we had experienced any significant level of disruption to our home phone or internet service.

I questioned Chris as to his qualifications to make a technical decision in respect of this matter and he stated that he had no technical qualifications.

I explained to Chris what length I had taken to record data of outages / loss of connection. I asked him if he had examined this information prior to speaking to me. He said "No". I advised him that I would not speak to him any further until he had at least reviewed the case properly.

It was two weeks before I heard from my complaint manager Narelle again. She requested an update of the service. She asked if I had contacted Telstra /NBN to report any issues, I said "No, because you said there was nothing that could be done by Telstra." It was at this point that Narelle offered me a payment of \$300 to my Telstra account as an act of goodwill from Telstra. In all, \$600 was credited to my Telstra account.

In late August I heard back from the TIO, this time it was another complaint handing officer. He requested an update on the case which was given. The TIO would be talking to Telstra about this matter.

On 9/9/16 a new NBN Box was installed. To date, there have been 3 new modems, 2 new NBN boxes and a new power supply to the NBN box.

There were further reports made to Telstra / NBN throughout September. In late September and into the October long weekend, we lost our NBN service completely. This required us to use a dongle for a number of days. Telstra were forthcoming with 60 GB of data for the dongle.

NBN Technician attended on 4/10/16 and examined the NBN and determined that the serial number of the unit not been coded correctly. This was corrected.

On 18/10/16, after several days of interruptions Telstra / NBN were contacted again and arrangements were made for a new Modem to be sent.

The modem (Telstra Model 800) arrived on 19/10/16 and there were some initial problems with WiFi connections. Modem restart appeared to fix problems. The modem was larger and more power in terms of WiFi signal.

On 24/10/16 Telstra complaint manager rang seeking an update, as did the TIO.

On 19/12/16 I spoke to the TIO and it was agreed that most of the issues associated with internet connection seem to be resolved with new modem. TIO case file closed off.

Since December 2016 the internet service to our home has been better but it is not perfect. Users within our home are occasionally disconnected due to no WiFi and we have to switch WiFi button off and back on to re-establish the connection. On average this is 2-3 times per day.

We have not reported anything to Telstra since December 2016 because I believe it is a waste of time and I don't believe they can properly resolve the matter. We will continue to use the service as it is, with regular loss of WiFi connection.

POINTS

- In all honesty, I do not believe that Telstra and the NBN are properly equipped to handle the rollout of the NBN in its current capacity. There are simply not enough personnel to do all the work involved. There is a lack of personnel and knowledge in the faults/complaint handling section to deal with the volume of reports.
- As a retired person, I was able to monitor situation, be home for technician and communicate during business hours. I would hate to be in a situation where I was working and trying to resolve any issues associated with the NBN. I know of numerous people who take time off work to wait for technician who simply don't turn up and don't contact the client to advise them of delays.
- Telstra and NBN technicians are not allowed to attend an address at same time. Why? I believe that if a Telstra Technician and an NBN technician were able to attend at the same time and work through a problem issues could be resolved far quicker.
- My local Federal member, Lucy Wicks was of little use to me when I needed it most. My first call to her office was not recorded or acted upon. My second call resulted in her ringing me to advise a technician was booked. I knew this as I had arranged it. With the NBN being such a big issue in my local area, the local member needs to be on top of things and respond to her constituents when required.
- The fact that there are NBN personnel with no qualifications in Telecommunications making decisions about technical matters is totally unsatisfactory. It was only that I had the nerve to question their qualifications that I was able to have this matter progressed. Imagine an elderly person accepting their judgement call and then having ongoing issues just because the NBN personnel believe they were right.
- It is only a matter of time before an elderly person may die because of the issues associated with the NBN rollout. How many elderly people are put in the situation

where they have the NBN connected and they don't realise that they have no phone connection when there is a loss of power. This needs to be addressed.

- The cost of my issues to Telstra and NBN would have been in vicinity of \$10,000. Telstra allocated in excess of \$1,000 to me alone to re-credit my account and in good will. Then there is the 4 modem (\$1,000) 2 NBN boxes and a new power supply. Also, the amount of man hours for technicians attending my home, researching and monitoring my service, the customer service personnel that I dealt with on a very regular basis. This all adds up to a consider amount.

My submission details a lot of times, dates and information record over a 12 month period in which I had issue with my NBN service at my home. The problem is not totally resolved however I have decided to live with it for the time being as I do not have the time or patience to deal with Telstra / NBN personnel who are not qualified to do the job properly. I believe that Telstra or NBN still do not fully understand the nature of the problem with my NBN service.

I have pages and pages of information about who I contacted and when, when I had outages or loss of connection. In total, I would have spent days on the phone spent days. I would be happy at any time to contact to discuss this matter further.

Respectfully yours

Gary Jackson