

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Telecommunications Amendment (Mobile Phone Towers) Bill 2011

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of my local community of Mount Hawthorn, Perth, I wish to strongly support the Bill to amend the Telecommunications Act of 1997, on the basis that the Act is seriously outdated and requires urgent revision. Among its many flaws, the Act does not provide any meaningful protection for communities living and working close to telecommunications towers, from continual exposure to electromagnetic radiation.

There is a large and rapidly growing number of communities across Australia very concerned with their lack of power in the face of proliferating telecommunication facilities being installed in close proximity to homes and schools. The current Act allows telecommunication carriers carte blanche to install so-called “low impact” telecommunication facilities where they deem fit.

Our local community of Mount Hawthorn, an inner city suburb of Perth, has been facing a problem which is all too typical across Australia today. In 2010, Optus announced its intention to install a low impact base station on the roof of our very small local shopping centre, which is in a predominantly residential area. The proposed site was around 70 metres from, and in direct line of sight with, a child's bedroom and there were other homes within this radius from the site. There was a huge and immediate response from our community, resulting in almost 800 signatures on a petition and many others signing letters, opposing Optus' proposal. Our Council (the Town of Vincent, now City of Vincent) also objected to the proposal. Optus eventually came back with a proposal to install the base station less than 100 metres further forward on the same shopping centre roof, still in very close proximity to homes.

Throughout a protracted process of emails and letters exchanged between community members and the Optus' site acquisition team (Daly International) there was a sustained dismissal of our concerns. Optus (through Daly International) repeatedly reminded us that the predicted EMR emissions from the base station (and indeed all base stations in Australia) fall well below the national safety standards. We were also repeatedly reminded that as this proposal related to a “low impact” facility, neither our community nor our Council had any statutory powers to stop the installation.

Like so many others around Australia, we have lost faith in the safety standards applied in Australia to levels of EMR emissions from base stations. We are well aware that at present there is no proof that we will not be harmed by continual exposure to EMR emitted from nearby base stations. There is simply no science yet available to provide proof of the safety, especially over time, of this type of exposure. To the contrary there is mounting evidence worldwide that exposure to EMR emissions is indeed harmful. As the level of concern around the world increases with regard to mobile phone usage, now classified

by the WHO as “Possibly Carcinogenic to Humans”, people are increasingly concerned about the possibility of carcinogenic effects from continual exposure to the same form of radiation in smaller but continual dosage. This is especially alarming in regard to children whose bodies are extremely vulnerable to the effects of radiation, and pregnant women.

The Precautionary Principle MUST be applied in a real and meaningful way to telecommunications facilities, yet this is not happening at present. Carriers can override the real, legitimate and loudly expressed concerns of communities, to install their base stations (“low-impact”) wherever they deem convenient and cost-effective, in spite of the fact that these base stations may have equivalent or higher EMR emissions than non- low-impact towers, for which planning approval requirements and other criteria are applied.

The Act must be rigorously examined and amended and the proposed amendments, although not as far reaching as we would have liked, offer some hope for greater protection for communities.

Given the level of concern and protest expressed around Australia about the unwilling exposure of ourselves and our families to EMR from base stations (as opposed to the personal choice to use a mobile phone), one can only imagine the immensity of a class action type suit which may arise in the event that this technology is proven to be as detrimental to health as so very many of us suspect.

If other countries, such as Switzerland, can adopt far more stringent standards for maximum allowable EMR emissions from base stations, then Australia can and should do so also. The standards adopted by ARPANSA can only be regarded as arbitrary, because to date, there is no proof regarding safe exposure to any level of EMR, over time.

It is also absolutely essential that homes be considered “sensitive sites” when locating mobile base stations. So many people spend most of their time at home; vulnerable children, parents caring for young children, the elderly and those who work from home, and the remainder of the population also spends around 14 hours per day in their homes.

While mobile phones and telecommunications technology are a part of everyday life for Australians, we strongly request that our legitimate health concerns, and our rights to exercise choices in the processes of site selection for base stations, are given precedence over the commercial interests of the telecommunication carriers.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Robertson