



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TONY WINDSOR MP
INDEPENDENT
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Shop 5
259 Peel Street
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

All Mail: PO Box 963
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

Ph: (02) 6761 3080
Toll Free: 1300 301 839
Fax: (02) 6761 3380
e-mail: Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au
Web Page: www.tonywindsor.com.au

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PM to investigate 'Next G-CDMA' phone changeover

The Prime Minister John Howard has given an undertaking to investigate the terms of Telstra's turning off of the CDMA Mobile phone network and changeover to the Next G technology scheduled for early next year in response to a question from the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor during question time in Parliament yesterday.

Mr Windsor has himself experienced some problems with the new network and has also had other users express their concerns over its coverage and proposed timeframe for switching off the CDMA network.

Mr Windsor is particularly concerned with how and where "equivalence of service" will be measured.

"The term 'equivalence of service' appears to be another 'up-to-scratch' term that has too much wriggle room.

I have been led to believe that there will only be random testing undertaken by the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) and not comprehensive testing across all areas before Telstra switches off the old CDMA system.

How can users in regional and remote areas previously serviced by the CDMA network be guaranteed the continuation of their service unless every area is comprehensively tested?

We have all seen glossy maps put out by Telstra showing their claimed area of coverage however it's not good enough to just put out a map of coverage without proof.

People need the guarantee of the continuation of their service without hiccup before the CDMA network is switched off, not a random sample and rhetoric that the service is there when it isn't," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is also concerned about the lack of competition on the Next G network.

"Telstra is switching off the CDMA network on which they previously provided wholesale and roaming access rates to other carriers which at least provided some level of competition.

With Telstra now shutting down the CDMA network and introducing Next G and having no requirement or agreement to allow other carriers access at wholesale or roaming access rates, they are effectively creating another monopoly – something the Government was ostensibly breaking down to deliver better, cheaper telecommunications services when it moved to sell off the rest of Telstra.

This situation is the direct result of the Government's decision to fully privatise Telstra and whilst within Telstra's rights to do so as a now fully privatised company, the people of Australia just want a service delivered at an affordable price, not held to ransom by a monopoly and complicit government turning a blind eye to Telstra's actions having wiped its hands of any responsibility after selling off its shares," Mr Windsor said.

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Further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080 or 0427 66 8868

Question asked by Tony Windsor MP Member for New England to the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP on Tuesday 29th May 2007

Mr Windsor asked the Prime Minister: “Given the problems being experienced by regional users of the Next G network, and even in this building, will the Prime Minister outline to the House what he believes to be ‘equivalence of service’ between the two networks prior to a switch-off of the CDMA network?”

Will the Prime Minister give a guarantee that the CDMA network will not be turned off until all service delivery problems are totally rectified?

In response, Mr Howard said: “I don’t claim to be an expert on this subject, and I don’t mind admitting that.

And I don’t mind saying to the honourable member for New England that I will seek some advice on the content of his question from those who know a bit more about it than I do.

But I will indicate this: ‘equivalence’ to me sounds like one of those words that has to have a common-sense definition.

I am not going to make the mistake of giving some kind of on-the-run guarantee.

I think it is reasonable that people who live in the more remote parts of the country should have a reasonably equivalent service to those who live in the more densely populated areas—that is a very understandable desire of people who live in regional Australia.

That is why in a lot of areas, not only with mobile phone services but also with broadband, the government is going to great lengths to make certain that people in the remote areas of Australia are given a fair crack of the whip.

As to the more precise elements of the honourable member’s question I unashamedly say that I will get some advice and I will provide it to him as quickly as I can.”