



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Minister trying to stop country fallout over CDMA switch-off till after election

The issuing of a “draft licence condition” to Telstra to require them to keep the CDMA network open until the Next G network provides equivalent or better coverage and services by the Minister for Communication Senator Helen Coonan is only an attempt to stop fallout in country Australia from problems associated with the Next G network until after the upcoming election according to the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor said that the Commonwealth Government was now experiencing the consequences of selling off its majority shareholder status in Telstra and having to introduce ‘regulations’ to try to control what is now a public company with a responsibility to return profits to its shareholders and not just deliver a service to all Australians.

“Whilst Telstra has made public comments that it would not switch off the CDMA network until there was equivalence of service from the Next G Network, the Government is now forced to threaten it through regulation which will no doubt be challenged by Telstra as restricting their trade.

The Prime Minister wrote to me on June 13 assuring me that ‘Telstra was working co-operatively to achieve the same or better coverage and services through the Next G Network before the CDMA Network is closed’.

He also stated in the letter that ‘regulation is an option of last resort.’

How quickly we have reached the last resort particularly when the Government supposedly gave the National Farmers’ Federation and the National Party written guarantees to enshrine in the legislation measures to ensure that rural Australians have equitable telecommunication services no matter whether Telstra was sold or not.

It was interesting to note the recent NSW Farmers’ Association Conference led to its President Jock Laurie who was involved with the NFF’s unanimous decision on Tuesday 13 September 2005, coming out saying:

- 1 Rural NSW has raised concern regarding NextG network and has called on the Federal Government and Telstra to address the problems.
- 2 Phone and internet users at the NSW Farmers’ Association Annual Conference in Sydney today said current service levels are inadequate, fearing rural residents will be left behind
- 3 Despite the commitment from Telstra and the Federal Government, delegates are concerned that NextG isn’t even as good as CDMA.

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It is further interesting to note that Telstra is now a 'Principal' Sponsor of the NFF," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is currently surveying his electorate of New England on the current level of CDMA coverage and the Next G network in comparison and has accepted an invitation from Telstra to participate in the testing of the Next G network in his electorate.

"I have had a strong response to my survey asking people to identify where service currently is under the CDMA Network and the Next G network.

Allegations have also been made by a number of CDMA users yet to make the change that they feel they have been getting less coverage over the last few months which if true is great cause for concern as any audit taken now to be used as a yard stick for equivalence of service for the Next G Network would be lower than what has existed in the past and therefore lower the bar for the Next G Network coverage to meet.

What is the Minister going to do if Telstra doesn't comply with the regulation – switch Telstra's total activities off? - I think not.

It's obvious that the Government has lost control over Telstra's business activities since it sold the public's share and it must now act out a charade to try to muscle up in the lead up to the election," Mr Windsor said.