



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Next G service improving Maybe some consumer affairs issues with handsets Still need to extend switch off date for CDMA

Testing the equivalence of service of the Next G and CDMA mobile phone networks for two days this week has shown the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor that the Next G network coverage is improving but it has convinced him of the need to extend the switch off date for the CDMA network past January 28, 2008.

Mr Windsor is also concerned that whilst the 'equivalence of service' of the signal is getting better, the equivalence of the handsets to be able to pick up the signal has not happened from day one with early models sold experiencing difficulties perhaps raising some consumer affairs issues.

"I was pleasantly surprised that the Next G network signal compared well with CDMA signal levels on the route we took around the electorate however there are real issues with some handsets' capacity to receive the Next G signal.

"There are obviously areas that we didn't get to that are experiencing difficulties with signal and I would encourage people to continue to let me know their individual circumstances so that these can be addressed in the lead up to the switch over of the networks," Mr Windsor said.

"On the issue of "equivalence of handsets" Mr Windsor feels that there may be some consumer affairs issues that could arise from early models sold.

"I would suggest to people with early model Next G phones that they contact their nearest Telstra dealer and have their phone settings checked as there have been issues that in some instances can be fixed on the spot.

"If the phones are still not right after this, then I believe some people may indeed have a case for the phone to be replaced with a newer model without penalty as they may have been sold a product that does not meet the performance claims made in its advertising.

"It appears that early model Next G hand sets may not have been set up correctly for country areas and needed either some new software added to them or setting them up properly for Next G rather than having them searching for a GSM (digital) signal when none is available which quickly runs the battery down.

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“This possible consumer affairs issue became apparent after speaking with some people who had made the change to Next G but were not happy with their new service.

“Some people have even asked me to explore the avenue of a class action in relation to phones that have been sold under the pretence of that it will work ‘Everywhere you need it’, Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said there appears to be quite a variation in the ability of the currently available Next G handsets to pick and maintain a quality signal.

“One of the Next G hand held phones that we had with us showed good holding of signal in areas where at times the CDMA signal was quite scratchy or lost whilst another Next G hand held lost signal.

“The latest Nokia 6120 delivered the best hand held service however as yet it does not have a car kit available for it.

“My personal Next G phone, a jasjam iMate which incorporates data capabilities does not have the same coverage as the Nokia or the old CDMA that I had even with a car kit,” Mr Windsor said.

The switch over timetable is also causing Mr Windsor great concern.

“The number of people still needing to switch over their CDMA to Next G phones is very high and for all these people to be able to get a new phone by January 28 next year will be a logistical nightmare.

Supply of handsets and car kits for those requiring them will create a demand that I doubt can be met and when combined with the further roll out of Next G towers, I think the timetable really is too ambitious and should be extended in keeping with Telstra’s original undertaking to do so.

I will certainly be making representation to both Telstra and the Government to keep this commitment,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor took up the offer from Telstra Countrywide to undertake a tour of his New England electorate in a specially set up car with both CDMA and Next G mobile phones in car kits with standard 6db aerials as well as a number of hand held CDMA and Next G mobile phones.

The route taken on day one started in Tamworth going to Moonbi, over the Moonbi Gap Road through Moore Creek to Manilla, Barraba, Upper Horton, Bingara, Delungra, Graman, Coolatai, Ashford, Inverell, Glen Innes and Armidale.

On day two, the route headed south from Tamworth to Werris Creek, Quirindi, Carroona, Spring Ridge, Blackville, Willow Tree, Wallabadah, Nundle, Woolomin, Dungowan, Niangala, Walcha and Uralla.

“I thank Telstra, in particular Alun Davies and Ivan D’Amico for the opportunity to get a better understanding of the Next G network coverage in the New England Electorate and I look forward to working with the local Telstra people to make sure that our telecommunication services in the New England are as the Government promised when it sold Telstra off, equitable with metropolitan areas,” Mr Windsor said.