



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Windsor proposes “Regional Powered Tower Program” for country communications

A solution to country communication blackspots is to be proposed to the Australian Government by the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor’s proposal he has called the “Regional Powered Tower Program” is for the Australian Government to fund the construction of towers with power to them in suitable locations in currently unserved or poorly serviced areas that will enable telecommunication service providers with something to hang their equipment on.

“The genesis of the ‘Regional Powered Tower Program’ came at a community meeting at Yetman in the north of the New England electorate where the lack of mobile phone services and the impact on the community was the topic of discussions.

The need for the ‘Regional Powered Tower Program’ was reconfirmed during the two day Next G-CDMA equivalence testing tour that has shown more telecommunications towers in blackspot areas around the New England electorate are required and I have no doubt this would be the same in other country electorates.

In discussions with the Telstra representatives who I joined with on the testing tour, we again touched on the cost of constructing the basic physical tower structure on which the telecommunication equipment was placed and that in non-commercially viable areas this cost was preventing the delivering of services.

By the Government stepping in and providing the basic infrastructure, telecommunication service providers and users will have only the cost of their own equipment to cover and possibly a small lease fee to cover maintenance costs of the tower,” Mr Windsor said

Mr Windsor said that the average cost of a ‘powered tower’ is approximately \$120,000 depending on the location however he believes this expenditure by the Government will encourage competition among carriers – something the Government has always supported.

“Since Telstra has become fully privatised, its focus has understandably been to get a return on its investment to its shareholders not to subsidise a service to an area that is not commercially viable.

Whilst I voted against the full sale of Telstra, it is now a reality that we must live with.

However the Government guaranteed equity of access to telephone and broadband service and we must now demand that the Government delivers on its guarantee.

This ‘Regional Powered Tower Program’ will help do that and at the same time encourage other carriers like the recently announced OPEL alliance and others to provide competition to Telstra in both mobile phone and broadband services.

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The powered tower would also enable police and emergency services to enhance their communication in an area of need so there would be more benefits to the community that would justify the Australian Government's funding for such a program.

The Government often talks about leveraging their funding contribution - I can see enormous leveraging happening if they adopt such a program for bolstering country communications," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that the Yetman community in the north of the New England electorate should have been able to access Commonwealth funding for their tower now to be funded by NSW Police and other emergency services.

"A meeting in Yetman in April brought together police, ambulance, SES, RFS, HACC, Country Energy, Northern Inland Development Board, Inverell Shire Council and local residents along with Telstra Country Wide representatives as well as Richard Torbay Member for Northern Tablelands and me to look for solutions to getting mobile phone communication into the area.

A request was then forwarded to the Minister for Communications Helen Coonan by local Flood Intelligence Officer with the Inverell SES and Inverell Shire Councillor, David Jones with a proposal seeking "the provision of a mechanism for Federal Government funding to achieve powered telecommunication towers for isolated rural communities", however funding has since been announced for the tower by the NSW Police and other emergency services through the efforts of Richard Torbay, and with further in-kind support from the Inverell Shire Council.

This "Regional Powered Tower Program" would be a mechanism that would deliver such outcomes for communities like Yetman without them having to put their hands in their own pockets or seek other funding avenues when access to this service is taken for granted by other Australians living and working in more densely populated areas particularly when its provision will extend its benefits to others passing through the area who may need access to the service for emergency and other communication needs," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor has had other locations identified in the New England Electorate that need powered towers and would benefit from a program such as the "Regional Powered Towers Program".

"Placement of powered towers at locations like Dungowan, Upper Horton, White Rock Mountain, Fig Tree Hill, Gagan Mountain, Pindari Dam, Wallabadah, Acacia Plateau (Legume) spring to mind and I'm sure others will be identified that will provide a more comprehensive telecommunication coverage of the region.

The Government may have abrogated its responsibility to directly deliver telecommunication services to country people when it sold off Telstra however it still has a responsibility to provide the infrastructure on which those now tasked with doing this can do it.

It's like building roads. The Government owns the road but it doesn't own the trucks that deliver goods along them.

So it could be with telecommunication services too through the 'Regional Powered Towers Program'," Mr Windsor said.