



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Westpac Rescue Helicopter Bike ride accident highlights need for better mobile coverage

An accident on the annual Westpac Rescue Helicopter Fundraising bike ride on Wednesday has highlighted the need for better mobile phone coverage across the region according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Three riders were injured after coming off their bikes on the Copeton Dam to Bingara Road with one needing the Helicopter service to get to Tamworth hospital whilst the other two were transported to Inverell.

Mr Windsor was contacted by the organisers of the charity ride raising the problems that they experienced in calling for emergency help.

“The organisers of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Charity Bike ride have contacted me about the lack of mobile service for an emergency that arose following three of their riders coming off their bikes and needing help.

Unfortunately there was no mobile coverage in the area so it was impossible to get an emergency call out for help with fellow riders having to climb to the top of a hill to get the call out.

This situation highlights the need for improving the mobile phone coverage not only in the Copeton to Bingara area but across the many areas currently experiencing nil or poor service,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that a proposal he had given to the Minister for Communications recently would help fix the problem and would no doubt help to save lives.

“I recently put a proposal to the Minister for Communications suggesting a Regional Powered Tower Program to build towers with power to them in locations that were needed but not commercially viable.

Even though the Government has now sold Telstra hence making it shareholder return focussed, the Government still has a responsibility to ensure people living in regional and remote parts of Australia have equitable access to telecommunication services as promised.

There is \$2B invested in a Communications Trust Fund which should earn approximately 5% return or \$100m per year.

This funding would go a long way to providing power to towers to places like Fig Tree Hill which would also cover the very popular recreation area at Copeton Dam as well as other locations where there is currently a problem.

Emergencies don't just happen in mobile range but we should be doing all we can to continually improve the coverage area so people have every chance of surviving accidents.

We have the technology so let's spread it,” Mr Windsor said.

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