

Mrs Cynthia Tomalin  
"Chittick"  
Shearers Road  
Hanging Rock NSW 2340  
Phone/Fax: (02) 6769 3626  
Email: tomalinb@northnet.com.au

Regional Telecommunications Inquiry  
Locked Bag 8690  
Canberra City ACT 2601  
Email: rti@dcita.gov.au

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Dear Sir,

After years of putting up with an intermittent, noisy and unreliable telephone service my husband and I decided to get serious by keeping records and complaining bitterly.

It was approximately eight years ago we purchased a facsimile machine, (we knew the internet was totally out of the question) only to find it would not perform to anything like the standard I was use to in my office in Sydney.

Reverse polling to retrieve meteorological maps was impossible. Most of our received/sent faxes were unreadable or failed to completely send, the whole process made a sloth look hyperactive. When we had a standard letter on an A4 page take twenty minutes and paper work to prove it at last someone listened.

Eventually action, when approximately three and half years ago and nearly \$1million spent on the upgrading of our service with fibre optic cable, a mini exchange and copper feeder line. This upgrade services twelve households and is linked to Tamworth by radio link completely by-passing the Hanging Rock Exchange.

Although all this money was spent not all the households have the same benefit, for if the residence was some distance from the new copper feeder line their old line was just connected to, so incorporating some ancient inefficient cabling back into the new system.

When we inquired as to why the Hanging Rock Exchange was not to be upgraded we were told it would cost \$2 million and basically Telstra was not prepared to spend the money. The Exchange is a Multiplexer of Israeli origin and can not be tested into, a technician has to physically travel approximately 90 km from Tamworth to it to investigate any complaint or problem.

Consequently our community is still suffering from the inadequacies of the local exchange with all its 'clicking' and 'banging' making even the basic voice quality inferior. Let alone the Internet, making connection virtually impossible with drop outs and a far slower speed than Telstra guarantee of 19.2 kb/s. (Refer page 11 of the Commonwealth Regional Information Book)

In our small community we have got Internet speeds varying from 12 kb/s on old cabling connected to Hanging Rock Exchange and up to 44 kb/s on the upgraded line that by passes the Exchange.

One of the long running problems is the 'long ring', a continuous ringing tone which will not activate a facsimile machine or an answering machine but curiously the caller gets a normal ringing tone.

Also there is the 'open line syndrome', on picking up the hand piece to ring out finding no dial tone, so you just wait minutes or hours until the exchange decides to give you back your service. Not very useful in an emergency and anyone trying to call you during this phenomenon gets a normal ringing tone that goes unanswered as it has not got past the Exchange.

Another problem is 'wet weather', the effect being voice quality suffers and actually sounds as if you are speaking under water it is quite a strange sound, but basically the phone still sort of works.

These faults are intermittent in nature and hard to track down consequently people have come to just accept them as part of living in a rural area but that was up until the Internet arrived lately.

How long will it take to get our community on an equal footing or "up to scratch" with their neighbours?

What is the guarantee that we will all not be left in a time warp, not kept abreast of current technology in the future?

Even though our line has had an upgrade it is by no means perfect as local knowledge was disregarded when the routing of the line was decided and set in concrete at the design stage.

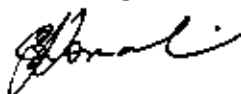
Lightning strikes and difficulty of access in steep terrain in wet conditions to service the line were virtually ignored. Not noting the problems of the original line has led to lightning and flood damage after only months of its installation on the copper section.

Only this week on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September we, and the whole district lost our 'dial tone' between 9.30 am and 4.00 pm due to problems with wind and the radio link aerial. This collapse had been flagged to us by 'holes' in conversation and lines missing in received facsimiles for a month or two but we were unaware of the fault origin until yesterday. For some reason I'm unaware of a number of services locally still have not been restored.

'CDMA Black Spot' - The Nundle Shire and village area is currently what is referred to as a 'CDMA Black Spot' and with its increased popularity as a tourist destination an upgrade in the service is essential for at least safety reasons.

Recently the Native Vegetation Advisory Council (NVAC) spent two days visiting the Shire staying in the Nundle village, members of this committee hold very senior positions in the bureaucracy and just expected to have mobile phone access. To their dismay and chagrin they had considerable difficulty making calls and accessing their mobile phone messages. This highlights the expectations and problems of mobile phone users when in Nundle and the surrounding Shire area for whatever reason.

Yours faithfully,



Cynthia Tomalin

c.c. Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson  
Communications Minister Richard Alston  
Senator Sandy MacDonald  
Tony Windsor MP  
Roger Bamber, Managing Director Commercial and Consumer Services, Telstra