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14 MAY 2025

Hon. Mark Shelton MP
Liberal Member for Lyons
Email: C/o Laura Ross, Clerk of the House Laura.Ross@parlimanet.tas.gov.au

Dear Mr Shelton

CONSTITUENCY QUESTION – Regional Communications and Mobile Black Spot Program

Dear Mr Shelton,

Thank you for your constituency question on 6 May 2025 requesting an update on the current status of the Mobile Black Spot Program in Tasmania and to outline what further steps are being taken to improve mobile coverage across the state.

Network congestion and service quality are well known issues nationally. In December 2024, the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee delivered its report to the Australian Government. Among the issues identified, the review confirmed that:

- a) Existing mobile networks in many regional areas are under pressure and facing congestion and capacity issues that require urgent attention to ensure reliable service; and
- b) Extending terrestrial mobile coverage remains prohibitively expensive.

Since the shutdown of the 3G networks, some parts of Tasmania have been experiencing poorer mobile coverage which have been adversely impacting residents and businesses in these regions.

Prior to the 3G shutdown, telecommunications providers indicated that they would not switch off their 3G networks until the 4G networks had achieved 3G network equivalence. However, telecommunications providers advised that some customers who had previously received 3G coverage outside of the published maps – referred to as ‘fortuitous coverage’ – would not be guaranteed to receive the same incidental coverage.

The Tasmanian Government has been working with Optus and Telstra through federal initiatives such as Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) and Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) to improve network connectivity for affected areas.

We are aware of Telstra and Optus partnering with satellite communication providers to test direct to handset (DTH) technology which has the potential to significantly improve regional connectivity, however there is no timeline on when this technology will be available for their customers, and what handset limitations may or may not be imposed.

It has also become apparent recent upgrades to infrastructure in regional Tasmania has not resolved mobile black spots nor does it cater for peak tourism periods which see a surge in local and tourist populations during the summer months and holiday periods such as Easter.

The Mobile Black Spot Program (the MBSP), funded under the Australian Government's Better Connectivity Plan, invests in telecommunications infrastructure to improve mobile coverage and competition across Australia.

The Tasmanian Government has contributed a total of \$880,000 towards Tasmanian projects over the seven rounds, including support for Targa, Nunamara and Temma.

Round 8, the latest round, of the MBSP was specifically intended to co-fund projects that will provide new, resilient, mobile coverage in regional and remote areas of Australia that are prone to natural disasters. We have been made aware of three industry submissions in Tasmania for Round 8 at this time.

Historically, Tasmania has benefitted from the Australian Government practice of ensuring that funding and projects are allocated across Australia's states and territories. For Round 8, the Australian Government has advised that it may consider each jurisdiction's relative share of land mass and premises without coverage to ensure that outcomes are not only delivered to the most commercially viable or populous locations.

Increasingly, remaining mobile black spots are in areas that have sparse populations, difficult terrain, power and backhaul challenges. Technology is also quickly advancing in the mobile technology landscape with the emergence of satellite enabled DTH capability.

The Tasmanian Government has also committed \$200,000 towards building a new Telstra mobile tower at St Helens to enhance connectivity, especially during natural disasters. This commitment was a response to the mobile phone service issues experienced by the St Helens community during its February 2024 floods.

Additionally, this Government partnered with East Coast Tasmanian Tourism to deliver a temporary 4G Telstra Cell on Wheels (COW) at St Helens for the 2024/5 Summer to address the surge demand for mobile connectivity during the peak tourism period.

The Tasmanian Government will continue to advocate to the Federal Government to improve telecommunications infrastructure across the state, including the area around Little Swanport – to ensure it meets the same standard as our mainland counterparts.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Ogilvie', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP

Minister for the Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy