

8th September 2016

Australian Consumer & Competition Commission
Competition in Evolving Communication Markets

To Whom It May Concern

I would like to take the opportunity to submit details of how the NBN Co. Service affects me and my business as a Published Author & Parent.

In June 2015 my husband and I relocated to a small township within the North Burnett Region from one of the larger towns. We were informed that we would have access to satellite services on purchasing our property. Back in 2000 we had been living in a small community within the Bulloo Shire so this did not instill any fear of satellite. Little did we know every scintilla of our life would change—and not necessarily for the better.

In 2011 my first book was published in the USA. Being an author in today's rapidly changing world, means being online.

On our move to Coalstoun Lakes we signed up to the ISS (Interim Satellite Service) through Activ8me. If only we'd known at the time just how woeful the situation would be we might have been far more concerned. We struggled on with 20Gb of internet that was ineffective, rapidly depleting and not fit for use. We'd sit there, trying to carry out the basic tasks of banking (because there were no banks locally and those that were still there have decreased the services as everyone does it online, right?)

Completing our daughter's tax return was a nightmare. As the ATO in their wisdom have you "run all the updates" when you download the tax package, in just 20 mins we ran out of data. Here's why.

- 1.** Attempt to load the page. Attempt to reload the page when it times out. Rinse and Repeat. (Most pages required between 5 - 10 reload attempts before you could access the information.)
- 2.** Download the package.... (timed out again... and again... and again...)
- 3.** Get the package, hooray. Oh okay, we need to run the updates. The same thing happens again.

Forget other basic services such as installing critical updates for phones, Ipad and computers. Not only was the latency an issue, but also so was the amount of data. You just couldn't do it.

In order to finalise these things, we had to throw ourselves upon the mercy of friends in town with unlimited data so we could complete tasks. It's demeaning and inefficient.

In March 2016 our oldest daughter moved out of home and into town 20 mins away. We breathed a sigh of relief then, because we could finally access enough data to do our daily tasks. As a result we offered to help her with internet at her house on the understanding her youngest sister and ourselves could use it. As a result **every** working day I would make the 40 minute round trip to download mail, check banks, pay bills, and generally do the day to day tasks required by me as per my contracts with US & UK publishers.

Quite often these tasks include:

1. Manuscript Submission
2. Contract Negotiations
3. Edits (multiple rounds of both Copy & Line edits)
4. Interaction on Cover Art
5. Discussion re Marketing Strategies
6. Active participation in Social Media (as agreed to via contract)
7. Blog posting
8. General Interaction with Readers

Please note, during this time NEITHER of our daughters was able to access the internet as we physically didn't have enough for 4 adults. However, as we live in an area with NO mobile service, they couldn't just purchase internet to use - they had to wait until we travelled to a town with internet service, visit the library and use the freely available data the council makes available.

Even with our strict enforcement of no YouTube, nothing graphical (which in today's world is next to impossible as banks etc. require you to access their graphic heavy websites) and the government services being channeled through their websites which are data hungry we would still run out of data approx. 14 days into the month. My ability to do my job was severely hampered and I was incredibly lucky to have publishing houses that were aware of and understanding of my plight. But my sales dropped significantly making it hard for me to continue to build a brand as an author.

In July 2016 SkyMuster was installed out our premises. It has certainly improved the situation, however, with only 35Gb Peak and 50Gb off-peak, we still have to be super careful with our usage. We still cannot access basic services. We still make the round trip to our daughter's house to access internet. We cannot Skype/YouTube/Bank etc., as the continuation of data suck means we have to make every bit of data stretch.

Forget Netflix. We just want access to quality data that we can use. I'd love to use the 50Gb off-peak but 1am -7am means it's nigh on impossible to use. We now get up around 5am to complete some tasks... so we can access this.

I haven't even started on the ability to keep up social interactions with friends, share photos and highs and lows. Rural internet makes us not third or even fourth class citizens in the digital world. We're like the ghosts... passing in the night never to be seen or heard from.

Our daughter - on unlimited internet - pays \$79.95 for fixed wireless with a VOIP phone. At 1Tb that works out to \$.0799 per Gb. We have 35Gb (peak) and 50Gb (offpeak) Were I to quote 85Gb that works out to \$.6464 per Gb. To access 1Tb would cost us \$646.40 - that's not equitable. Further, we can only access 150Gb per month and of that the breakdown would be 60Gb (peak) 90Gb (offpeak) for \$199.95 per month.

That's 2.5 times the cost our daughter pays!

Yet the Fair Use Policy clearly states:

Furthermore, nbn co requires each customer to limit their Peak Hour Data Usage to no more than 75 GB in any four week period.

and

nbn co requires all RSPs to limit their average customer Peak Hour Data Usage to no more than 30 GB of downloads and no more than 5 GB of uploads in any four week period.

I'd like to see similar restrictions placed on those utilising NBN services in the city... there'd be a public outcry.

However, it seems to me that the rural and remote communities are being told to suck it up because we have no voice. No one is advocating for us within the government. On more than one occasion I made representations to our local federal member who told me Skymuster will let me watch Netflix and do what I want. It will fix all my problems. Therein lies the rub. There is NO understanding of what we want and/or need.

They don't recognise that the FUP and Costs of accessing the satellite system will strangle commerce and business. That by being unable to use the same levels of connection that things must go by the wayside. What will it be? Healthcare? Education? Access to families and friends which impacts on mental health?

As more and more services are being online, we become more disenfranchised and less able to conduct everyday activities. Passports, Medicare, Tax Returns, Centrelink. All these services are now being pushed into the online portals and with such restricted data WE CANNOT USE THEM.

Banking is another issue.

We need equitable access of service for an equitable cost. We want access to a service that works and is reliable (not constantly timing out) and we want to run our businesses, access medical care and educate our children. These are **basic needs**. We aren't asking for anything that we wouldn't be able to access if we lived in town.

HumanRights.org.au states:

8 A right to access the Internet

While there appears to be no express right of general application to 'access cyberspace/the Internet' stipulated in any of the major international human rights instruments,[210] it has been argued at the international level that such access is critical, particularly in terms of the right to freedom of expression, and in the redressing of structural disadvantage. Accordingly a number of countries have, in varying forms, formally recognised human rights to access the Internet. These trends are considered below, along with developments within the Australian context.

As a result of the strictures we've had to put in place enabling myself and my husband to have limited connectivity, we've had to restrict our daughters from accessing internet at home. One daughter is trying to find work - a task that is severely hampered by her inability to get online at home.

She's not just unemployed—she's one of the forgotten as she cannot access any assistance from the government as she lives at home and our income exceeds the threshold for assistance. She cannot study as she cannot access assistance and doesn't have internet. These are the forgotten children. The ones who will end up living in poverty in the future unless things change.

The access to internet is a basic human right. It gives us access to employment, to education and to the world. Ensuring equitable service should no longer been seen as an optional extra and it is my hope that NBN Co., will reconsider the financial impost and the inequitable plan guidelines ensuring that ALL Australians, including those living outside the cities, will be able to enjoy a level playing field.

I haven't addressed my husband's issues as he has other issues that impact of the safety and security of the region and it is my hope he will also lodge his own submission.

I thank you for the time and the opportunity to submit this brief view of the effects of insufficient and inequitable access to data in a rapidly evolving communications market.

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Kind Regards

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