



TASMANIAN FISHING INDUSTRY COUNCIL

ABN 61 009 555 604

21 February 2008

Regional Telecommunications Review Committee
38 Sydney Avenue
Forrest ACT 2603

SUBMISSION TO THE REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVIEW COMMITTEE

TFIC as the peak body representing Tasmania's seafood industry welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Regional Telecommunications Review Committee.

TFIC wishes to submit to the Committee the following regional telecommunications issues:

1. Consideration of Tasmania's geographic isolation, topography and distribution of population

The isolation of many of Tasmania's coastal and fishing settlements, and commercial fishing grounds, has rendered them without comparable metropolitan standards of telecommunications services. Moreover, only one telco service provider operates outside the two major metropolitan centers. In the regional communities the lack of competition has resulted in higher costs and fewer product choices as well as little incentive to invest in an expansion of coverage to meet fisher and fisher community needs.

2. Lack of mobile service coverage in the South West Coast region as a safety and business issue

Specifically, the South West quarter of the State's coastline has always been outside of those areas receiving mobile service coverage (whether it be analog, digital, CDMA or Next 3 G). This is a significant issue both in terms of safety communications as well as business communications. Given the inadequacies of current marine radio coverage, satellite phone and EPIRB alert services (refer to Issues 3, 4 & 5), hand-held mobile phone communications present the fastest, most reliable and pragmatic option for fishers at sea to communicate safety issues to each other and to emergency services.

Similarly, commercial fishers plan fishing activities and decide upon processors and ports at which to unload on the basis of information on the beach price of their commodity, which is constantly fluctuating and can make fishing a commercially marginal activity depending on markets. This information is communicated to and between fishers by VHS radio when available and satellite phone service when available (at significant cost).

In terms of a solution, extension of mobile phone service coverage to the South West coastal region would enable fishers to use mobile phone services for safety and business purposes and would reduce costs, increase reliability and greatly assist fishers in making business decisions.



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3. Reduction in marine radio service coverage in the South West Coast region as a safety issue

With the reduction in HF marine radio services commercial fishers are restricted to using VHS services, which are only available in line-of-sight situations. This does not provide fishers with a reliable and comprehensive mechanism for communications, particularly in safety situations when extreme weather conditions can prohibit line-of-site position and reception of signals.

In terms of a solution, while the Tasmanian seafood industry acknowledges that the restoration of HF marine radio services is unfeasible, in light of the loss of this highly valuable service, extension of the coverage of mobile phone services across the South West coastal region would redress the negative impact the loss of HF marine radio services has had on the rock lobster, abalone and scalefish fleets.

4. Inadequacy of EPIRB technology as primary communications tool in emergency situations

The current EPIRB service, which is to require personalized EPIRB licenses for satellite EPIRB units to which data concerning the vessel and skipper are attached, is not the preferred communication technology for the majority of safety situations which fishers encounter at sea. The lag time in response (up to 4 hours) by emergency services helicopters and vessels in accessing fishing vessels on the remote South West coast is potentially life-threatening in a drowning incident, for example. Commercial fishers preference in the first instance is to be able to reliably contact nearby fishing vessels to call for assistance. Currently, VHF marine radio services are only available for line-of-sight communications and hand-held satellite phones can fail to receive a signal if the vessel is located beneath cliffs or is in a location between satellite passes (refer to Issue 5).

In terms of a solution, the most practical and potentially reliable communications option to address this scenario is to extend mobile phone service coverage to the South West coast region of Tasmania.

5. Inadequacy of hand-held Satellite service and coverage as a primary communication tool in emergency situations & expenses to seafood business associate with on-going running costs of satellite phone services and upgrades to better models

Commercial fishing vessels are frequently equipped with both boat-based or mounted satellite phones and hand-held satellite phones. Currently the costs of installing this equipment is partly subsidised by government monies however the ongoing running costs are not (with rates for calls at an average price of \$3/minute). Newer models offering better and more reliable services are now available on the market however upgrading to these models is not covered by the subsidy system. The use of hand-held satellite phones as a safety communication tool is preferred by many fishers as these can be transported in dinghies and other types of tenders (abalone diving is operated out of dinghies) whereas mounted satellite phones cannot be installed in these vessels. Currently handheld satellite phone units are not providing reliable services to fishers, given the rocking motion of the vessels which prevents the signal reaching the satellite, the proximity to cliffs, the frequency of extreme weather conditions and the frequency of gaps in service between satellite passes (all of which compromise the signal).

In terms of a solution, while the preference for fishers would be to extend mobile phone coverage to the South West coastal region, a second option would be for the subsidy program to extend towards



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meeting the on-going running costs of satellite phone services, as well as subsidizing the upgrade to the newly available models which provide a superior service.

6. Expenses to seafood businesses associated with experimentation in new telco services & equipment

The replacement of the CDMA network with the Next 3 G network has required commercial fishers around Tasmania to replace their CDMA equipment with the available Next 3 G models at some cost to business. Since that time it has been apparent that the earlier models of Next 3 G were not able to provide fishers with equivalent services to the previous CDMA network. At further significant cost and with considerable lobbying and political pressure, the telco provider has more lately made available to fishers superior Next 3 G equipment which offers a service more comparable with the CDMA service.

In terms of a solution, while the seafood industry understands the need to improve networks and the requirement to upgrade equipment, it is requested that telcos be *obliged* to ensure that users are not left out-of-pocket in real terms, that is, there is no additional costs or inconvenience in transferring to new network equipment which offers an equivalent if not improved service at the time of upgrade.

Yours sincerely,

Rodney Trellogen
Rodney Trellogen
Chief Executive Officer
TRLFA

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Neil Stump". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neil Stump
CHIEF EXECUTIVE