



OFFICE OF SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

Mr Darren Chester MP
Member for Gippsland
PO Box 486
SALE VIC 3850

14 AUG 2012

Dear Mr Chester

Digital TV reception in Boolarra

Thank you for your representation dated 10 July 2012 on behalf of Mrs V [] to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy about digital reception in Boolarra, Victoria. The Minister has asked me to reply to your letter.

The Australian Government understands the importance of free-to-air television to regional and rural Australians and has introduced policy and legislative measures to maximise viewers' access to digital television services. Providing equal television services to viewers in regional, rural and remote Australia is a central feature of the government's digital switchover program.

The Minister has prepared a response to the petition from the residents of Boolarra to be tabled in the House of Representatives. The Minister's response provides detailed information about the works carried out by Regional Broadcast Australia (RBA) on the Boolarra site to ensure that adequate terrestrial digital coverage is being provided to the residents of Boolarra. In addition to the information provided to your office in previous correspondence on this matter, you may find some of the information provided by the Minister in his response to the petition is helpful in understanding why some of the residents of Boolarra are experiencing difficulty with their digital reception.

Monitoring and maintenance of transmission sites by the commercial broadcasters

The commercial broadcasters, through RBA, advised the Minister that they first became aware of people experiencing difficulty with television reception in Boolarra in the first quarter of 2012. At this time, they engaged a local antenna installer to investigate viewer concerns. The installer visited several residences and noted that viewers had not yet properly tuned their reception equipment to adequately receive digital services from the local Boolarra site. The installer advised RBA that he was able to resolve all reception issues in the houses that he visited by making simple adjustments to existing reception equipment.

Also in the first quarter of 2012, RBA engineers conducted an assessment of the transmission site itself and identified a tree that had the potential to reduce the level of coverage in some parts of Boolarra. This tree was removed as part of ongoing maintenance of the site in order to continue to provide good levels of coverage.

Ongoing monitoring conducted by the commercial broadcasters also noted that there were issues with the local WIN and Prime services, which had been observed to drop out intermittently. The issue was identified as being caused by a faulty GPS clock in the main Latrobe Valley transmission site on Mount Tassie. The Latrobe Valley site is the main feeder site for a number of other transmission sites in the area, including both Boolarra and the Jeeralang/Yinnar South sites. The faulty unit was subsequently replaced and no ongoing problems with either WIN or Prime have been observed by the commercial broadcasters.

RBA has also advised the Minister of its ongoing maintenance activities across regional Victoria. All local transmitters have full-telemetry units installed, allowing real-time 24/7 monitoring of the sites from broadcaster operations centres. Any faults that are raised through the remote monitoring or via complaints from local viewers are passed on to a First-In Maintainer (FIM) for further assessment. FIMs are generally local contractors, often a reputable local antenna installer, who are given familiarisation training on specific transmission sites. The FIM conducts a basic assessment on the working condition of the equipment and whether or not repairs are required. If a problem is identified, engineering support is despatched from the state headquarters of the broadcaster responsible for maintaining a particular site, and spare transmission equipment is held in Melbourne, allowing for quick mobilisation if repairs are determined to be necessary.

RBA has advised that ongoing monitoring of the remote transmission logs for transmission sites in the Boolarra area have not identified any further issues since the replacement of the GPS unit at the Latrobe Valley transmission site on Mount Tassie.

Improving digital television reception in the Boolarra area

Separate from the technical issues that have been addressed by the broadcasters, there are a number of physical factors which may explain the reception difficulties residents in Boolarra have experienced.

If viewers had good analog television reception, it is generally the case that they would be likely to receive satisfactory digital television signals. Factors that can lead to poor reception of digital television services can include signal obstructions, such as the local terrain, foliage, and nearby buildings and trees. Reception may also break up or 'pixelate' because of old or poorly calibrated antennas, faulty cabling or connectors, incorrectly tuned set-top boxes, weather conditions, an inadequate or excessive signal, or because of 'impulse noise' interference caused by electrical equipment and appliances.

Some viewers in the Boolarra area may also receive digital television services from the nearby Jeeralang/Yinnar South transmission site or the more distant Latrobe Valley transmission site located on Mount Tassie, as well as from the local Boolarra site. Viewers in areas who receive services from more than one transmission site need to ensure that their antenna and television reception equipment is optimised to receive services from the site that provides the strongest and best quality signal to their residence.

The Taskforce has consistently recommended that viewers in the Boolarra area who experience difficulty receiving digital television services should seek the services of an endorsed antenna installer who can provide advice on the best way to optimise equipment for the available services in the area, and for their specific residence.

The Minister acknowledges that some residents of the Boolarra area may have experienced some difficulty obtaining adequate reception in the months following the commissioning of digital television services from the Boolarra site. However, he is confident that the broadcasters have completed all necessary adjustments to their transmission infrastructure in the region to enable them to provide adequate terrestrial digital television to residents of Boolarra, and that ongoing monitoring of transmission sites in the area is robust and responsive.

The Minister encourages residents of Boolarra to contact the Taskforce via the Digital Ready Information Line if they have done all that they reasonably can do to receive digital television, including engaging the services of an endorsed antenna installer, and they continue to experience reception difficulties.

Thank you for bringing these matters to the Minister's attention. I trust that this information will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Dawson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Emma Dawson
Senior Adviser