



The Hon Anika Wells MP
Minister for Communications and Minister for Sport
Member for Lilley

Ref No: MC26-012319

Mr Llew O'Brien MP
Member for Wide Bay
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Dear Mr O'Brien

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 August 2026 on behalf of Mr Lester Kirkwood, President of the Cootharaba Community Association, regarding mobile and internet services in Cootharaba, Queensland.

I acknowledge the concerns raised by the Cootharaba Community Association and the broader community regarding mobile coverage in the area, following a recent telecommunications survey. The Australian Government recognises the importance of reliable telecommunications services in supporting the safety, connectivity and resilience of regional communities.

I understand how frustrating it can be when mobile phone services become unavailable or unreliable, particularly when they affect a person's ability to stay connected. However, mobile phone services in Australia are not subject to the same access provision requirements as standard, landline telephone services (voice services), whereby reasonable access for all Australians is protected under the Universal Service Obligation (USO). Under the USO, Telstra has regulatory and contractual obligations to provide fixed phone and payphone services nationally on reasonable request.

The government has announced the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) which will expand mobile coverage by requiring Australian mobile operators (Optus, Telstra, Vodafone/TPG) to make outdoor SMS and mobile voice calling reasonably available on a national basis. Mobile operators are expected to meet the UOMO by leveraging their current mobile networks and, in areas without terrestrial mobile coverage, direct to device (D2D) technology enabled through Low Earth Orbit satellites (LEOSats). Framework legislation is currently before the Parliament, with the UOMO due to commence in December 2027, subject to market developments. The government is legislating the UOMO now to ensure critical technology is deployed as widely and quickly as possible and to ensure Australians benefit from this new technology. The UOMO will expand outdoor mobile coverage to areas that currently have limited or no service, improving connectivity and supporting safety, participation, and economic activity, particularly in regional and remote Australia.

Improving mobile reception

Mobile coverage is influenced by a number of factors that can degrade the quality of signal being received from the nearest mobile base station. This includes local hilly terrain, distance from the base station, number of concurrent users (capacity limitations), physical obstacles such as trees and buildings, and the internal structure of buildings including people's homes. These factors can change over time, for example when new buildings are constructed in the area or there is an increase in the local population. Also, access to 4G and 5G services depends on having a compatible device.

A service provider is best placed to respond to a customer's concerns as it has the greatest knowledge of their individual circumstances and the performance of its network at customers' locations. If an issue is identified, the service provider is best placed to advise and implement the necessary solutions to help resolve customer complaints.

If a resident is not satisfied with the response from their service provider, they may wish to raise their concerns with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO). The TIO is a free and independent alternative dispute resolution body for consumers with complaints about their telecommunications services. While the TIO cannot instruct mobile network operators to install or upgrade infrastructure to improve network performance, the TIO can consider complaints from consumers who feel they are not receiving the service they are contracted to receive from their provider. The TIO can be contacted via its website at www.tio.com.au/about-us/contact-us or by telephone on 1800 062 058.

Mobile network operators offer products that may improve mobile reception, including external antennas and authorised repeaters for indoor use, and products for vehicles. The most appropriate product may depend on the network and prices can vary. Residents can obtain accessories and advice on the best solution by contacting their service provider, nearest mobile phone shop or recognised dealer.

- Telstra, for example, has released a 'Smart Antenna' to improve indoor reception on its network. Telstra also offers a GO ROAM mobile repeater that maximises coverage voice and data connectivity, and quality for moving vehicles.

Residents may wish to consider alternative services via the National Broadband Network (NBN), such as satellite, fixed wireless, or fixed line, as these technologies may remain **available even if the mobile network is temporarily unavailable**. Wi-Fi calling is another option on compatible devices, allowing some customers to make calls and send texts over a Wi-Fi connection. This can be helpful for customers with poor or no mobile coverage. Further information on NBN broadband services is available at www.nbnco.com.au.

If these options do not help to resolve mobile reception issues, your constituents may wish to consider investigating whether a different service provider might deliver better mobile coverage in the local area. Pre-paid SIMs are an inexpensive way to test this or neighbours may be able to provide advice about the quality of the services they use. Coverage in the local area can be checked on the websites of major mobile network operators at:

- www.telstra.com.au/coverage-networks/our-coverage;
- www.optus.com.au/living-network/coverage; and
- www.tpg.com.au/coverage.

You may be aware that, under Round 2 of the Mobile Black Spot Program, the government funded two Optus macro cell sites at Boreen Point and Cootharaba Road. These sites commenced operation in August 2020 and October 2021. Following receipt of your letter, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts sought advice from Optus about the current operation of these sites. Optus has confirmed the performance of the two sites is trending as normal and there have been no reports to Optus of performance impacting the network. If residents in the Cootharaba area have complaints regarding the Optus service, they can raise those concerns by calling 133 937 or by using the link on the Optus website at www.optus.com.au/for-you/support/feedback-and-complaints/make-a-complaint.

While the government supports the construction and upgrade of mobile network infrastructure, investment remains a commercial decision for the telecommunications industry, and the government cannot direct the industry to invest in specific infrastructure or locations.

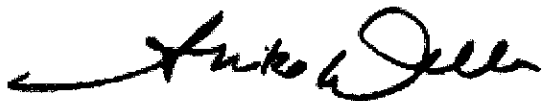
I encourage residents of the Cootharaba area that use Telstra as their mobile service provider to continue to engage with Telstra. A service provider is best placed to respond to a customer's concerns as it has the greatest knowledge of their individual circumstances and the performance of its network at customers' locations.

Residents may also wish to consider practical measures to improve mobile reception, including the use of an external antenna or authorised signal extension device, or enabling Wi-Fi calling where available. I have enclosed information on these options, which you may wish to provide to local residents.

I encourage continued engagement between the community, telecommunications providers and local councils to support the consideration and resolution of mobile coverage issues in Cootharaba, Boreen Point and surrounding areas.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Anika Wells

23 September 2026

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