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Australia
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The Hon Alexander Downer MP
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Inadequate telephone service in Echunga

Dear Mr Downer,

In March and July 2003 I wrote to you to express my concern about the manner in which Telstra handles faults in the Echunga area. As I stated at that time, it is evident that Telstra is not in a position to uphold the Customer Service Guarantee, and instead finds it cheaper to pay compensation than to maintain an adequate maintenance crew.

Today I find myself once again in exactly the same situation as on the previous occasions. After heavy rain, all of my telephone lines have failed. At 22:00 on 21 June I raised a fault with Telstra, number 116269434. Telstra acknowledges the fault and promised to have the fault rectified by close of business on 23 June in accordance with the legislated Customer Service Guarantee. By expiry of this period, they had not even started digging. I have registered a complaint, number 1-48335559, which I expect will have no more effect than the previous complaints of this nature. I am maintaining a web log of the incident at <http://www.lemis.com/grog/Telstra/outage-jun2005.html>.

As I wrote on the previous occasions,

The linesmen with whom I spoke were unanimous that the entire cable is in need of replacement. Telstra proposes to replace only 150 metres of cable. There is already one temporary ("E71") repair a few hundred metres further down, and the linesmen found the line quality so bad that they expected further failures either side of the current repair site.

I am sure you will agree that this situation is unacceptable. The damages that I and others have experienced must run into the tens of thousands of dollars. There is every reason to believe that the cable will fail again in the near future, and based both on Telstra's past performance and my observations of their reaction times, I must assume that the next time it happens, we will lose the use of the phones for a similar period.

These predictions have come true. On this occasion, the failure is directly adjacent to the repair made in March 2003.

Once again, I ask you to investigate this problem and prevail upon Telstra to improve their service and to consider performing a proper repair to the entire cable, rather than to individual pieces. Such a repair should also replace the old pair gain systems.

I also believe that it is in the Government's interest to review the Customer Service guarantee: the penalties are so low that it is not in Telstra's interests to maintain the customer service guarantee in all cases. In reply to my last complaint, you voiced your opinion that the sums stipulated in the guarantee are adequate. I disagreed then, and I disagree now. It is obvious that Telstra finds it cheaper to pay the penalties than to supply the supposedly guaranteed service. At the very least, it should provide for companies to claim damages for such cases. *My vote in the next election will be strongly dependent on a review of this matter.*

Sincerely

Greg Lehey