

Mr Paul Gibson MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Standing Committee
on Broadband in Rural and Regional Areas
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000

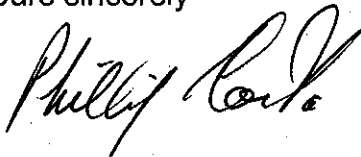


Dear Mr Gibson

Re: Current inquiries by your Committee

Please find attached a submission to your Committee from Corrective Services NSW.

Yours sincerely



The Hon. Phillip Costa MP
Minister for Water
Minister for Corrective Services

Corrective Services NSW – Inquiries by Legislative Assembly Standing Committee – Broadband in rural and regional communities.

Technology plays a crucial role in enabling Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) to fulfil its contemporary role of delivering professional correctional services in both custodial and community-based settings. Technology (and, by extension, access to technology) has been referred to as the 'toolbox' of CSNSW staff.

Access to CSNSW corporate systems is of critical importance to CSNSW staff to ensure that current and all available information is available to make critical and (in some-cases) life-threatening decisions. This occurs by way of 'alerts' and notifications on the CSNSW Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS), its primary electronic-based IT system. For instance, an 'alert' that inmate "A" must not associate in any way with inmate "B" could prevent physical combat between them in the event that they inadvertently met each other in a correctional centre.

Historically, the criticality of this system access has been compromised by exceptionally poor fixed and mobile telecommunication network services in rural and regional areas. Whilst in some areas connectivity is acceptable, in the most part (particularly in relation to mobile phone services), service is at best patchy and at worst unacceptable. This adversely impacts the ability of staff to do their job, and for CSNSW to meet its obligations to the community.

The often-remote and isolated locations of CSNSW locations, both custodial facilities and Community Offender Services, combined with poor telecommunication network services, compounds the difficulty of CSNSW meeting its obligations in rural and remote areas.

While CSNSW continues to make high-profile representations to telecommunication providers and continues significant investment to improve connectivity, the results remain poor and will not be resolved until telecommunication network coverage is considerably improved.

Cross-Justice Video Conferencing System

The Cross-Justice Video Conferencing System is an ISDN network-based system that connects over 25 CSNSW sites (including correctional centres, 24-hour court cell complexes and CSNSW corporate offices) by audio-visual link (AVL) to each other and to courts.

Since its implementation in 2002-03, the AVL system has dealt with over 133,000 matters in the Supreme Court, District Court, Local Court and State Parole Authority without the inmate leaving the correctional centre.

In the 2008-09 financial year, 31,330 matters were dealt with by AVL, representing approximately 43% of all court matters facilitated by CSNSW (the remaining 57% being "inmate in person" appearances requiring conventional transport). Of the 31,330 matters, 10,522 (33.6%) matters were facilitated in regional centres.

All these video conferencing matters are operated over an ISDN network. For the 2008-09 financial year, the total ISDN cost was \$746,180; so the cost of the regional matters would have been approximately \$246,230. This represents a considerable saving on the potential cost of physically transporting the inmates from correctional centre and return (both in staff wages and the capital outlay required for transport vehicles).

Nevertheless, if these matters were facilitated using a Broadband / IP (Internet Protocols) Network, these costs would be reduced and produce even greater savings.

Government Radio Network

CSNSW uses the Government Radio Network (GRN) for communication with Court Escort Security Unit inmate-transport vehicles including all operational duties, escorts and emergency situations. The GRN is used for long-range multi-user radio communications.

Radio communications are not affected by broadband, nor is broadband a necessary means of communication for these units in rural and regional areas. Broadband cannot replace the GRN.

However, particular mobile security units have experienced difficulty in obtaining access to the CSNSW network (email, intranet) as a result of a remote location. This mostly affects administrative duties.

Intensive supervision in the community

Intensive supervision (eg home detention, extended supervision orders, supervision by the Community Compliance Group) involves offenders subject to geographical restrictions wearing an ankle bracelet to enable electronic tracking of their movements.

Intensive supervision uses the GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) cellular mobile network; therefore the coverage of electronic monitoring is only as good as the coverage of the GSM mobile phone network. It is not based on broadband communication.

In some rural areas, GSM coverage is considerably limited by the GSM network, so poor telecommunications is an issue (eg Tamworth). Extended supervision order and home detention offenders must reside within an area that has good GSM coverage, otherwise they would be assessed as unsuitable for that program.