Submission from Kevin Farrell

While the members of the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities visited Griffith on 21 February 2008, Mr Kevin Farrell contacted me to raise his concerns about installing broadband internet services.

He would like these issues to be raised as a submission to the Committee:

Mr Farrell is a retired teacher who runs a small farm business. He works almost full time as a casual teacher and has limited time to deal with these issues.

Mr Farrell previously received internet access via satellite under the Federal Government's Broadband funding program and was under the impression that he retained ownership of the receiving equipment if he was able to obtain service another way subsequently. He contacted Telstra's Bigpond call service to change services to Next G Wireless Broadband recently and was sent a blue modem unit to set the wireless service up, supposedly a simple procedure. The service would not link and in one of the first calls he made to Bigpond Technical Service the customer service worker was extremely dismissive of his comment about selling his equipment and refused to proceed with the call unless he admitted he could not sell the equipment. After repeatedly asking to move on to the service issue but being refused this Mr Farrell eventually asked to speak to a supervisor.

Mr Farrell has a new iMac computer running on system 10.5. Mr Farrell, his wife and daughter (who has some background in IT in her university studies) made many attempts to set up the service. He estimates that they spent about 25 to 30 hours dealing with the issue and made numerous calls to Telstra and were given contradictory and misleading advice on a number of occasions. For example, Mr Farrell was sent a software disk with the modem which was listed as V2.8 . He was told that this would not work and that a new Version 2.10 disk would be sent. The same disk arrived. Then he was told it would work but he would have to download an update but this could only be done on a PC. He would have to go to a friend's place and download the software. This was done inconveniencing both Mr Farrell and his friends. The software (Version 2.10) didn't help even though Mr Farrell spent over an hour with a Technical support person trying to get it to do so. Advice was given that he would need a firmware software file again from a PC. He went into town the next afternoon and spent an hour in a computer store trying to get the download done. It didn't make any difference.

Mr Farrell was then told that Mac system 10.5 was not supported by Bigpond Wireless Broadband. He asked if it would work if he reinstalled system 10.4 on his machine and was told "Yes". He reinstalled system 10.4 only to find it still did not function. He reinstalled system 10.5 when the next support person told him it was supported by the system.

In doing the installs he lost all his email folder contents and his movie projects were destroyed and lost.

Mr Farrell estimates that, in all, he spoke to over forty individual Technical Support people, sometimes being passed through three or four on any single call.

Finally after approximately three weeks he tried a rest button on the modem during one call and the system started. The reset button had been tried several times before during one hour-long call but, at that time, did not make any difference. He tried the rest button out of frustration while waiting for a Technical Support person to get some advice.

Mr Farrell had a call from a Complaints person but was not home to take it. He has left a return message asking her to call him but has not heard back since (Monday 10 March).

He would like Bigpond to see if they can retrieve his email archives from their computer archives. He is also looking at having to do over fifty hours of work to reload and edit video he had on his computer before he lost it during the installs.

He still does not know if he can sell the satellite equipment on his roof as he was advised he could do when it was first installed and as several Bigpond Support people told him he could do so during this drawn out process.

He considered that this was extremely poor customer service as a significant minority of the public use Macintosh computers rather than PCs. He was planning to impose on a friend who owned a PC to download the patch however, a local Telstra employee suggested an alternative computer he could use. This solution was still less inconvenient than if appropriate software had been provided in the first place.

Mr Farrell estimates that he has spent a significant amount of his limited spare time trying to do something that should be extremely simple.

Vicki Buchbach
Committee Manager
14 March 2008

I would like this to be considered a submission to the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities.

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