

**TO: MINISTER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES**

**RE: STATE RADIO SYSTEM MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

## **BACKGROUND**

A contract was entered into with Telstra 19 April 1999 to provide a radio communications system known as the SA-GRN. This contract will continue to 24 May 2006.

A committee known as the SA-GRN Ministerial Steering Committee was established to oversight the transition of agencies to the SA-GRN with a proposal that this service would replace all wide area radio systems operated by agencies.

In January 2003 you formed a committee known as the State Radio System Ministerial Advisory Committee with a broader role than the previous Steering Committee. The Advisory Committee was established to consider the total radio needs of the State and in particular to ensure that services provided met the demanding needs of the emergency services.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Committee has met on four occasions and has established that the current contract with Telstra will not meet the needs of user agencies in all areas on all occasions.

A view has been formed that there are four key areas that need to be considered by the Committee now and on an ongoing basis. These relate directly to agency operations and are listed below:

- Coverage: The area were services are provided via the total state radio service
- Continuity: What processes and technology needs to be in place to ensure the appropriate level of services are available when needed
- Capacity: What capacity is required to meet a range of scenarios that may confront agencies and how the necessary capacity can be achieved in an economic manner
- Contingency: What plans do agencies and contractors have in place to deal with situations of systems failure or overload

At the strategic level the Committee needs to consider the provision of adequate radio frequency spectrum for the State's purposes that allows interoperability across jurisdictional and geographic boundaries. Further, this radio spectrum needs to be harmonised on an international basis to ensure effective market competition is achieved.

### **Coverage**

The contract with Telstra provides wide area radio services to approximately 226,000 square kilometres and the area inside this footprint is to receive service between 90% to 95% in total.

Whilst this is a quantum leap in service to all agencies, the contract with Telstra does not effectively deal with areas not serviced within the footprint or areas outside the contracted footprint.

The Committee has the view that it is a unrealistic proposition to expect the contract with Telstra to deliver all of the requirements being expressed by agencies. Further, the promotion of the SA-GRN has resulted in an expectation level that won't be met by this approach or any single technology solution.

Broadly speaking, where the SA-GRN service is available there is great satisfaction experienced by users. However, a higher expectation has been built which has resulted in agencies expecting more than what can be provided by the contract with Telstra.

### **Coverage Related Matters**

There are some areas where the service provided may meet the contractual requirement but not the expectation of users. Major criticism has occurred and this has been founded in part by the over promotion of the service and therefore a belief that an area is receiving an inferior service to other areas. A notable example of this is the service to CFS members in the Gilbert Valley.

This type of issue is being addressed by consultation with affected agencies and seeks a solution that will provide the required service and integrate it in the overall State Radio System. The extension of the SA-GRN may be an option but in most cases the problem can be overcome by using compatible technology without the expansion of the SA-GRN

There are other areas where a particular small location is poorly serviced and does not receive a strong signal. These locations can be critical to a particular agency operation and causes complaint by the agency. There are currently approximately 60 such locations. Whilst this circumstance was foreshadowed in the contract there will still be a cost to providing service in these locations.

These types of situations can be economically addressed by provision of a very localised service that receives, in the case of paging, a feed from the SA-GRN.

A draw on the contingency fund could be considered to address these areas.

There have been other concerns that have arisen as a result of building construction carried out after the formation of the contract. Examples are the new Convention Centre area and the Marion Shopping Centre.

In both of these instances these situations have been overcome by the expansion of the SA-GRN. Consideration of radio communications for emergency service organisations should take place in the future planning of major constructions, particularly in the design phase. This matter is being taken up with the appropriate authorities.

There are a number of locations where contract compliance is yet to be confirmed. An example of possible non-compliance is the Carpenter Rocks area in the South East.

It is expected that clarity on these types of matters will be available by mid July when the due diligence process is completed. A submission on actions required can then be forwarded.

A further category is where Telstra is not compliant with the contract and the notable case here is the service provided within 10 Kilometres of Houghton (this includes the Gorge Road). In these cases Default Notices have been issued to Telstra and remedial action is being taken.

The final category deals with new requirements of agencies. Some of these have developed over the last six years and some of these have developed as a result of seeing value in the service and a desire to expand the scope of the service. The Operations Sub-Committee has initiated a process to prepare proposals in relation to this matter for consideration by the Committee

### ***Continuity***

In relation to service continuity there is reliance on a single system provided by Telstra that has a very high reliability of 99.995 availability. However, the reliance for the greatest part of operational communications on a single system poses risks that need to be considered. The events of September 11 2001 showed that multiple communications systems were impacted or disabled.

Interestingly, the network operated by the New York Emergency Management Office is of the same type used in South Australia and performed without interruption. Nevertheless, the reliance on a single system as proposed in the original GRN concept poses considerable risk in the new world environment.

The Committee is of the view that with the benefit of the September 11 experience a service based on a diversity of networks is more prudent.

## ***Capacity***

The capacity of the SA-GRN is defined within the contract with Telstra and further provides for expansion to meet agency growth to a limit of 50 additional channels. Growth in channels will require the provision of additional radio spectrum from the Commonwealth.

There was concern expressed by SAPOL earlier this year in relation to capacity and Telstra resolved this by the installation of 22 additional channels.

There is a need for agencies to develop scenarios to show their likely traffic needs in particular events to enable Telstra to provide capacity where required and justify allocation of spectrum by the Commonwealth.

The SA-GRN should not be considered in isolation but rather as part of an overall solution that involves mobile telephony, satellite services, agency based short-range equipment and HF radio.

Each of these services has a role in the overall provision of capacity to meet particular circumstances

## ***Contingency Planning***

The current world circumstances indicate that threats to critical infrastructure will continue to be real.

Therefore it is important that service providers have plans to protect infrastructure and to ensure service continuity is maintained. In conjunction to the arrangements with Telstra we need to ensure that these are in place and tested.

The status of other communication providers to the State and agency based systems is unknown.

The SA-GRN provides the bulk of the communication capacity for agencies and agencies need plans at a tactical level to manage events that may disrupt the service.

At the strategic level the Committee will look at ways that create diversity in communications arrangement that retain the advantages of an integrated network.

## ***Radio Spectrum***

Management of the allocation of radio spectrum with the Commonwealth is a key strategic issue.

Sufficient radio spectrum of the correct frequency is fundamental to ensuring the capability to inter-operate between agencies and across jurisdictions.

Further, Australia is a very small market in the global sense for communications equipment. Failure to have spectrum harmonisation at the global level will mean that Australia will continue to have limited supplier choice and the inability to take advantage of competition in the future standards based environment.

DAIS has given consideration to the procurement of frequency allocation to meet needs outside the current GRN Contract and these are in place.

### ***Contract Management and Service Delivery***

DAIS has the responsibility for the management of the GRN Contract with Telstra and all other government information and communication service contracts. Therefore the Department has a good understanding of the issues surrounding convergence and the procurement approach to leverage advantage across a number of contractual arrangements

I have found that the contract is managed by DAIS in a robust and constructive way to gain the best advantage for the State and to maintain a constructive working environment with a long-term supplier.

You will be aware of real savings that have been made to date as a result of what I perceive as good contract and project management. I believe that further saving will be forthcoming and these could be considered for deployment to enhance services where necessary.

DAIS staff demonstrate a real effort to work effectively with end user agencies and have a great expertise in the broad and complex arena of telecommunications.

Whilst it is more a matter for the Department I do note that overall resources available to manage an operation with turnovers in excess of \$30 Million and assets and contracts managed measured in the \$100's of Millions is relatively small.

The lack of resources sometimes results in frustration both within DAIS and end user agencies in terms of response times.

I have also noted that there is considerable variation in the knowledge and competency of agencies at the "coal face level" to effectively operate in a contract environment rather than an 'own and operate' environment. This sometimes results in an adversal approach to the contractor that does not bring the best advantage to the state.

### ***Conclusions***

The development of the SA-GRN has made a quantum improvement in the services available to agencies in terms of both coverage footprint and features.

The utilisations of solutions like the SA-GRN are being pursued in most jurisdictions in Australia to meet the realities of overall cost and requirements for spectrum efficiency.

The SA-GRN must be the centrepiece of the State's radio communications service if the aims of inter-operation and spectrum conservation are to be achieved at an acceptable cost.

To continue to pursue a single solution such as the SA-GRN increases risk and will not be the most cost effective approach.

The strengths of what has been put in place should be built upon by the use of a broader policy approach that you outlined in the Committee's Terms of Reference. This was considering the SA-GRN as the centrepiece of a State Radio Service.

The management by DAIS of this operation allows the effective management of the contract and the mechanism to deal with matters in a converging environment.

There is a need at the "coal face level" for some agencies to better understand the management in the contract provider service. In my view this could be achieved by short-term secondments to be exposed at a practical level to this environment.

Agencies should work constructively and actively with Telstra and DAIS in regards to contingency and specific scenario capacity planning.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Minister note the above information.

Jim Hullick OAM JP  
**CHAIRPERSON**  
**STATE RADIO SYSTEM MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

19 June 2003