

Office of Hon Clare Curran



MP for Dunedin South

Minister of Broadcasting, Communications
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Associate Minister for ACC

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BCDM1819-068

Ms Natalie Wilkinson
nataliejwilkinson@gmail.com

Dear Ms Wilkinson

Thank you for your emails regarding connectivity in Bethells Beach. Please accept my apologies for the delayed response.

I appreciate your concerns regarding connectivity in Bethells Beach. Access to resilient and reliable communications is essential. The issues you have described are representative of too many in New Zealand. All New Zealanders should be able to enjoy the benefits of digital connectivity regardless of income or geography.

The Ultra-Fast Broadband (UFB) programme, Rural Broadband Initiative Phase Two (RBI2), and the Mobile Black Spot Fund (MBSF) are on track to delivering better connectivity to many New Zealanders. However, we have a persistent divide between the “haves” and the “have nots” which this Government intends to address.

As you know, Bethells Beach and the surrounding area will get access to improved mobile coverage through the MBSF. This mobile coverage will also provide the Bethells Beach community with access to faster broadband speeds through fixed wireless broadband (using 4G technology). The Rural Connectivity Group (RCG), a joint venture comprised of 2degrees, Spark and Vodafone, has entered into contracts with Crown Infrastructure Partners (CIP) to deliver this improved connectivity.

Services are scheduled to be live at Bethells Beach by December 2020, and should be available at your address. The deployment schedule is now available on the National Broadband Map at <https://broadbandmap.nz>. Others in your community may wish to check their addresses by using this coverage tool.

I have noted your concerns regarding Chorus’ decision not to upgrade its network in the Bethells Beach area. I must advise that, outside of Government programmes, the planning of broadband networks are commercial decisions on the part of private companies such as Chorus, and will be driven by network priorities.

Chorus has no regulated obligations in terms of supporting the provision of broadband services. However, it is obliged to support Spark’s retail voice services.

However, I would like to reiterate the correspondence sent to you by my office about 4G fixed wireless technology. I understand that the Bethells Beach community wanted to get Ultra-Fast Broadband (fibre) instead of fixed wireless broadband. Fibre makes economic sense in high density urban areas but is less cost effective in more rural areas where the population is more dispersed. Fixed wireless broadband works well in providing high speed broadband in less populated areas.

Fixed wireless broadband provides connectivity using the same technology as mobile data. This means you will have a choice of connectivity options – you could use your mobile data and access the internet via your phone or you could purchase a fixed wireless broadband plan from a retail service provider that will provide your home with broadband connectivity. Fixed wireless broadband provides a more cost efficient connectivity option than purchasing additional mobile data and accessing the internet via your mobile phone.

Please be assured that this Government is committed to closing all digital divides and that means doing more than the current programmes provide for. We need to be ambitious in further improving connectivity in rural and regional New Zealand, and I am seeking advice on how we make that happen. However, as with roads, rail, electricity and aviation, the Government recognises that telecommunications infrastructure requires investment. I believe that the right approach is to look for the best possible infrastructure solutions, enabling the most usage and highest productivity for the greatest number of New Zealanders.

I am also encouraging communities to organise themselves to bring their ideas, time and resources to the table. This could take the form of land and sites for towers, or working together to determine and communicate where the most acute needs are, and what they can do with this technology.

Achieving our goals will involve taking a joined-up and ambitious approach to our digital economy; one that increases productivity and the economic benefits of the internet, but leaves no one behind. I intend to develop a blueprint for digital inclusion, and I consider that access to the internet is a key component of that blueprint.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several vertical strokes followed by a large, rounded loop.

Hon Clare Curran
Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media