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Cape Bridgewater Coastal Camp
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19th January 2003

David Hawker MP
Federal Member for Wannon
190 Gray Street
Hamilton 3300



Dear Mr Hawker,

The following details relate to problems my wife and I have experienced with our Telstra phone services, after we purchased the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp, now re-named as the Cape Bridgewater Coastal Camp, in December 2001. We have dated the below events of our complaints as correct as we possible could from our hand written notes taken at the time. Our note book records of these complaints are available for your perusal if so required.

December 2001

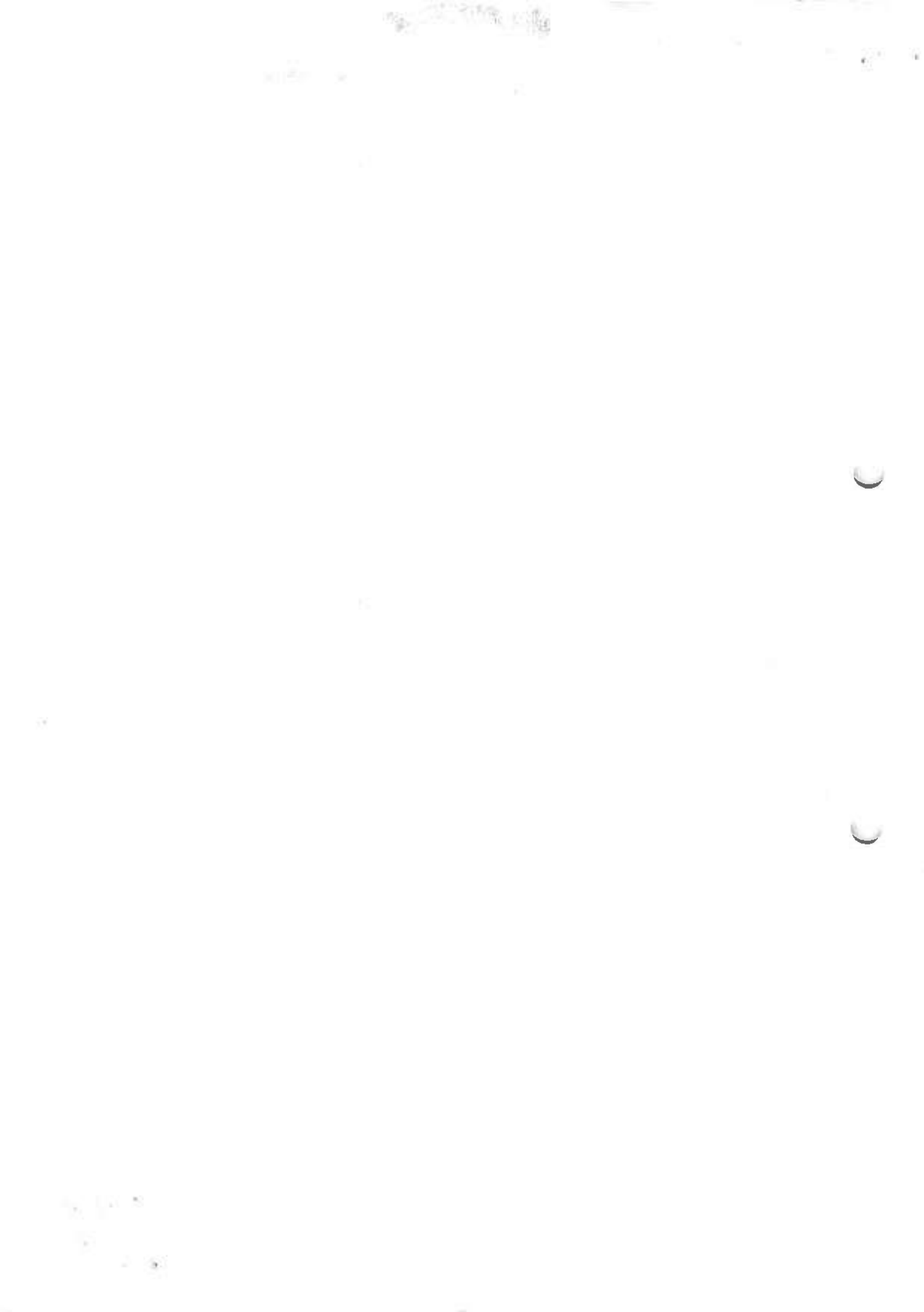
Although we were not aware of the significance of the incidents at the time, and therefore didn't actually document them, we clearly remember, over the first twelve months:

1. Often answering the phone to find no-one at the other end;
2. Receiving phone calls which registered on our answering machine, but left no message recorded;
3. Finding no calls recorded when checking 'Star-ten-hash' to see who had called and not left a message;
4. Finding a recording of messages related to calls made to our number on earlier days when checking 'Star-ten-hash' (even when we had checked on those particular earlier days);
5. During and leading up to November 2002 in particular, we were continually frustrated by clients, schools, friends and family members repeatedly telling us we were not answering their calls and insinuating that no-one was at the camp, when at least one of us was in attendance at all times.

For a long time we were reluctant to complain to Telstra because we were aware of the problems experienced by the previous owners, Alan and Cathy, when they tried to get Telstra to fix the phone and fax problems they had experienced. Before we purchased the business, Alan assured us that Telstra had now fixed all these problems. When we first began complaining to Alan and Cathy, Alan was reluctant to discuss his experiences with Telstra because he was concerned that we would think he was paranoid. He did explain however that he had had enormous problems with ex-Telstra employees living in Portland and therefore some people already thought him 'strange'.

Although Jenny and I were sure we were not imagining the phone problems we now found ourselves experiencing, we tried to put them out of our minds as we worked to build up our business.

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time needed to rectify this problem. He was making allegations that the wiring was not the work of a trained Telstra employee, stating God knows who would have done anything around this place. I believe he was insinuating that Alan Smith or friends had wired the camp themselves. This was not the first time this suggestion was put to me by local tradespersons. It was then that I phoned Alan to be sure that what Telstra was stating was either right or wrong. It was then that Alan hit the roof so to speak and came straight away to question who had made these allegations.

My concern was that perhaps Alan had misled me into believing Telstra had wired the Kiosk. Alan provided his arbitration documents which I believe he has since provided to you that confirms Telstra did all the cabling and wiring including the installation of the phone alarm tone ringer.

Here I was thinking that Telstra according to Alan's previous discussions with me prior to purchasing the camp that Telstra had fixed all these faults during his arbitration. And here was Telstra stating they had never been near the kiosk wiring because of the poor workmanship. It was on this day that Tony Fielding of Telstra's Country Fault Centre phoned having heard of the confrontation with Alan, myself and this Telstra technician Steven, inquiring why I had not phoned him as he was my designated fault manager.

Mr. Fielding went on to say that Telstra's senior technician in the area was coming out to assure me that Telstra would fix the wiring configuration etc at their cost. On arriving at the camp this Telstra manager after inspecting the junction box and other faulty wiring stating words to the affect similar to those of both Steven's, that Telstra surely could not have installed wiring in this manner. He was adamant that this time Telstra would carry the costs of the work needed to fix the phone problems but in the future all cost associated with this type of work would be on our shoulders.

I am a little concerned that the cabling from the camp kiosk to our office is not within the normal specified guide lines of depth and that in the future that a problem does arrive we will have to bare this cost. Alan Smith informs me that the Telstra arbitration documents he provided to you which were signed under oath by Telstra confirmed they did the cabling to the office along with the rests of the wiring in the kiosk.

Alan has now admitted in a round about way that he was aware of the continuation of one of these type of phone faults where people thought the phoned dialed out giving the impression the camp was unattended when the phone never rang at the camp was apparent prior to us purchasing the business.

6th December

The office phone rang and disconnected very quickly, before the answering machine could record the incoming call. Again there was no message on *10#.

7th December

I pressed *10# at approximately 9.10 am to find a message from 9309 7531, from the day before. This was a customer looking for accommodation but, when I contact them, they told me that they had gone elsewhere because we didn't return their call. Why did this call take a whole day to register on *10#?

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Some time around July last year (2002), a number of clients (who actually managed to reach us on the phone) again complained that we never seemed to answer their previous calls. These remarks created enormous stress for me: by this stage I knew Alan had had a nervous breakdown including a stay in hospital as a result of the problems he had experienced with the phones, when he owned the camp, and I began to suspect that he might have sold the property to us without properly warning us that the faults still existed. I was, though, really reluctant to accuse him of this. When I did raise the issue with him, he seemed reluctant to discuss these issues, because Telstra had assured him they had definitely fixed the problems at the exchange.

At this stage, we felt we could only discuss our worries with Alan and Cathy because we certainly didn't want to be talked about in town, as Alan and Cathy apparently had been talked about. Alan suggested we keep some sort of record of our concerns, perhaps in the form of a diary list. At the time, we thought he was being a bit 'over the top'!

It wasn't really until last August that it finally hit us that we were definitely losing numerous calls, and we really needed to do something about it. It was at this point that we began to take notes, as Alan had suggested. These records immediately verified that there were a number of different faults occurring, affecting both incoming and outgoing calls, as well as outgoing faxes.

LOST CALLS

People were continually telling us we were never at the camp when they rang, yet we knew at least one of us was around all the time, as our house adjoins the office. During the winter months of July to October, Portland gets quite windy and cold and so we spent most of our time in the office, planning advertising trips, and this is where we were at the very times that many of our clients complained about our phones not being answered. There is just no way we could have missed so many calls.

LOST FAXES

This was another problem but a difficult one to follow up: how can you continually phone clients to ask if they had received a fax in the last couple of hours, without looking pushy or demanding? We did, of course, check with clients some days later to ask what they thought of our advertising literature and it was these normal follow-up calls which began to alert us to faxes that had never arrived at their intended destinations.

STAR-TEN-HASH (*10#)

As previously noted, sometimes when we used this code we actually retrieved phone numbers from days before, which had not registered earlier. This is of little use to a business such as ours, where clients are either looking for accommodation for that same night, or wanting to confirm for the following night. We have lost numerous bookings because of this fault alone; a fault that Telstra has acknowledged is a problem in our area. I am confident that it was not uncommon on some days for this fault to occur up at least five times a day.

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The following dated summary of our records highlights the many problems we were trying to deal with.

21st September

Even more callers than usual complained of phone problems when they first tried to ring us.

22nd September

More complaints from people who had experienced problems when trying to phone us. On top of all these complaints, a number of customers told us (when they finally managed to get through to us on the phone) that they had first reached a recorded message stating that our phone was no longer connected. We registered this fault with Telstra and were provided with a special fault number (S11391550-7) for this particular complaint.

At this stage we began to keep more detailed records of the phone and fax problems, which were now really starting to get both of us down. As well, we discussed the situation again with Alan and Cathy, to see if they could suggest some way we could get Telstra to fix the faults.

Although we were new to this type of business, we were still aware that the tourist, school and social club market is a cut-throat one and, as the faults continued, we therefore became more and more distressed, partly because of our growing belief that Alan had deliberately not warned us that the phone problems still existed when we purchased the business, and partly because of the business we knew we were losing because of the phone faults. It was evident that, from the start, these lost calls had definitely affected the normal pattern of bookings that we could have reasonably expected.

23rd September

Again we received complaints from customers who had reached the 'not connected' recorded message. When we phoned Telstra again we were given another fault number (S111408836-2).

We had also been experiencing other intermittent problems, for instance, when we picked up the receiver to dial out we could sometimes hear another caller talking on the line as clear as clear can be. This even happened on one particular occasion, when we picked up the receiver to phone Lorraine Rivette from Telstra. Ms Rivette had previously rung us to discuss the fault we had reported on 22nd September and, when we finally managed to reach her, she assured us the fault would be rectified by 25th or 26th September. The problems were still occurring on twenty-fifth however, and Ms Rivette rang again to say that they would now not be fixed just yet.

By this stage, all Jenny and I could do was worry. We had first been told the fault would be fixed in three days and now we were told it could take eight days. I began to look for unnecessary projects to do around the camp spending time and money that really didn't need to be spent, just to take my mind off the fact that we were losing business through no fault of our own, and there seemed to be nothing we could do about it.

Jenny spoke to a Telstra fault operator from Wollongong, NSW, who said that her department could not provide any information about what was happening in relation to the camp. She reassured Jenny however by saying that she would personally contact someone from Newcastle, NSW, who would then ring us to help us get the ongoing faults fixed.

27th September

At about 8pm, Ian from COG (Telstra) rang and informed us that an EMG was causing the problem. He also noted that it was the second report he had received regarding this particular fault and said he would advise Telstra to send someone to fix the fault, which appeared to be at the local exchange.

28th September

We received a phone call from Renea, another Telstra fault operator, who informed us that a Telstra representative had advised him that the fault **was** in the local exchange. He made it quite clear that his advice was that the local exchange could only handle a certain amount of traffic at any one time and that there was nothing much anyone could do about the problem. He also emphasised that the problem was not new to Cape Bridgewater and said it had still not been fixed. I was perhaps a bit abusive at this point, telling him that these ongoing faults were costing us business and that I was going to again contact you, as my local member of parliament, and Telstra's CEO, Ziggy Switkowski. Even after this, Renea was extremely nice, noting that he fully understood my frustration. I very much appreciate this man's honesty and commitment to trying to help people like me, who ring with complaints.

3rd October

We rang our business phone number (55 267 267) from our private phone line, at around 12.30 pm, and let it ring three times before hanging up. When we then tested the *10# process on the business line but there was no message registered. We repeated the process, this time letting the phone ring seven times before hanging up. This time the *10# process worked correctly. Following these tests, at about 2.40 pm, we rang Telstra fault centre but, instead of being connected normally, we were informed that they were experiencing their own problems so our complaint had to be put through manually. Eventually I spoke to an operator called Jodie who told me that there was a problem with the *10# system at a national level and that it was being dealt with on that basis. I asked for, and was given, another fault number (S111438102). Jodie confirmed that, in many cases, *10# messages were taking up to two days to be re-cycled back to the customer.

By now I had also spent quite some time with Alan Smith, asking him how I should approach you regarding these continuing phone and fax problems. Alan told me that both Telstra and the Telecommunication Ombudsman's Office had refused to investigate when he had experienced similar problems after his arbitration with Telstra. This was when I began to wonder if perhaps Alan hadn't been completely up-front with me regarding the phone problems when I purchased the business. In all, I spent almost a whole working day in discussion with Alan and preparing my first letter to you.

14th October

Again I phoned Telstra to complain about more *10# faults, particularly one instance where we did not get the customer's phone number (so we could return the call) until two days after the customer had rung us. This time Telstra put me through to a lady in Townsville who informed me that she could not detect any problems from her section and that, because of our persistence, we would be put in a queue. We were given yet another fault number (S11480890).

This same day we also received a call from a customer looking for accommodation. This customer explained that they had phoned on 28th August, 6th September, 9th October and 12th October. Each time the line registered as busy. If these four separate calls had registered into the local exchange, even with the *10# fault still occurring, we would have been able to ring the customer back, at least within a few days. As it was, there was NEVER any record of them ringing and we are talking here about FOUR separate incoming calls which were never recorded on this message system. Here is irrefutable evidence of calls being lost to my business. In fact, Telstra's own CCAS data for November 2002 shows 142 incoming calls lost to my business and it now seems that the telephone wiring and alarm bell in the camp office was part of the problem, before they were replaced early in December last year.

The following anecdote is a clear demonstration of one of the phone problems we have had to cope with:

My camp looks straight over a wire fence into Alan Smith's property. One day I noticed Alan heading towards his office and immediately phoned him, only to receive an engaged signal, even though he had only just closed the door, which I know is at least ten paces from his office. Shortly after this we checked with Alan who told me he had not received any calls in the last hour or so. Cathy, Alan's partner, showed me the notebook she keeps beside the phone to record all incoming calls and there was no call registered anywhere near the time I had phoned them.

25th October

Terry Cain from Hamilton Catering informed me he had tried to ring me earlier but could only hear strange clicking noises – the call didn't connect.

26th October

More *10# problems. Telstra's Sydney fault centre asked if my phone was working correctly! What a joke! At first the Sydney operator said she couldn't supply a fault number and it was only after I insisted strongly that she finally provided a number (S11539136).

26th October, 2.50 pm

Received a call from Victor, in Telstra's Newcastle fault centre, who informed me that he would 'rebuild' our software and this would mean that the phone service would be off air for five minutes or so. About fifteen minutes later he rang back to say that that the *10# problems had been caused by a slight 'earthing' problem on our system (only on our line), but that he didn't know how long the fault had been there.



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Late October

Telstra's local technician Steven, arrived at the office door unannounced asking us if we were 55 267 267 we confirmed we were he advised us that he was working down at the Telstra kiosk location checking on some technical information. It was then that he informed us that his technical meter reading was not responding correctly and that the needle was vibrating which disallowed a correct reading.

He was at the kiosk site supposedly testing for faults associated with our previous registered phone problems. He entered the office looking at our phone system to find a reason for this malfunction. It was then that he informed us that the phone alarm tone ringer outside the office door could very well have been one of the reasons for our continued problems. He then went on to say that this type of alarm system was known to be a problem in moisture prone areas like Cape Bridgewater. The point was made very clear by Steven, that it surprised him that whoever installed this alarm bell did so facing the south west in direct line with the bay winds. It is commonly known that our wind and rain are most severe from this direction.

He made the comment that this type of alarm tone bell system had been a problem in the past on properties close to the ocean. It was then that he suggested we disconnect this alarm system from our phone lines as it was not working and could be one of the causes affecting our phone problems.

It was also around this time that this Telstra technician also commented that he was alarmed at the state of the wiring configuration in the kiosk area even to the point of suggesting that Telstra could not have installed this wiring and that it should be removed immediately. Apparently he found a numbers of wires not connecting to any specific outlet and appeared to be going nowhere.

Late October

Telstra informed us that they knew the *10# problem had been on our line for quite some time but couldn't say exactly how long.

Late October

John Matters from Telstra reported that he could not find any *10# faults on our line, but stated that he had experienced this fault himself. Tony, the metal collector, tried ringing us four times during the day, between 9.15 and 10.30 am and again between 2.00 and 3.30 pm. The phone rang out on each occasion and there was no message on our answering machine or on the *10# service, except for the last call.

Tony from Telstra informed us that we should complain to AAPT regarding problems with phone charges associated with lost faxes, as AAPT are now our long distance and mobile provider. He also said these were 'old recorded problems' which still had not been fixed.

Late October

Brian Adams, Camp Coordinator for Werrimul Primary School in Mildura, informed us that he had still not received the fax we had previously promised to send. Our fax journal clearly shows a fax going from our office to Werrimul Primary School – yet another fax sent but never received at the other end.

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By this stage, Jenny and I were starting to become very annoyed and frustrated with our new business. We felt seriously let down by Alan in regard to these phone faults and began to believe he should have warned us, before we bought the business, that there were ongoing problems with the phone lines. Alan has now shown us documents which confirm that lost faxes were a major problem at the camp before Telstra disconnected his designated fax line.

30th October

Telstra attached CCAS monitoring equipment to our 55 267 267 service in an attempt to find the cause of the faults.

5th November

A caller advised us that he had attempted to ring and received an engaged signal. This should never have happen because not only do we have *10# connected, but we also have call waiting so we don't miss any calls. Even if we had somehow missed an occasional call, the *10# service should have been operating as our safety valve, allowing us to ring back.

Telstra now began to disconnect our phones if our payment was even one day late (rather than notifying us in case we had overlooked the payment, as was usual). We began to wonder if this was Telstra riding rough shod over us because we had begun to complain in the same way that Alan had, before they disconnected both his lines because of the billing complaints he lodged with them.

This same day we received a telephone call from the Portland Observer Newspaper, asking us for a comment regarding the Channel Nine Business Sunday Show which showed Alan and others with phone problems calling for a Royal Commission. I was rather upset that the Observer would ring at this point because, only three days before, they had reported on Alan's previous and continuing problems with Telstra. I told them flatly 'no'. When I purchased this business, all I wanted was a trouble-free run and I made it quite clear to the Observer that I did not want publicity and I did not want to be seen as paranoid (as I know Alan has been seen).

8th November

Another caller reported that they had reached a recorded message saying that my number was not connected. I rang Telstra's Tony Fielding at 9.20 am and was told he was not available but he would return my call. He had not done so by 2.00 pm and I began to worry that my faults were now being moved to 'level two' and we were getting the run-around.

I also spoke again with Terry Cain of Hamilton Catering who said that he would not ring us again until we got our phones working correctly because every time he rang he got a fax connection tone.

9th November

A caller phoned at 3.20 pm from 53343926 and reached the message: 'The number you are calling is not connected, check the number before dialling again'. He phoned twice again around lunch time (about 12.45 pm), from 55 235147, and reached the same message.

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twice again around lunch time (about 12.45 pm), from 55 235147, and reached the same message.

13th November

I spoke with Telstra's Tony Fielding at approximately 12.00 pm, regarding the *10# problem, particularly in connection with problems being experienced by Timboon Secondary College.

I picked up the phone at 1.11 pm and heard a deep breathing sound, but no dial tone.

Checked *10# at 20.48 pm and the message recorded the last incoming call from 747282692 at ?

26th November

A plumber who was working at the camp accidentally cut through the underground telephone cable from the kiosk to the office. Our calls were diverted to our mobile until 8 or 9 pm. Telstra inspected the damage and announced that the channel taking the phone extension to the office from the kiosk was some 200 mm too shallow and they therefore believed Telstra had not connected the extension. We were also advised that the wiring and junction box in the kiosk had not been installed correctly and there were some wires going nowhere, suggesting that they had been tampered with.

We were now extremely distressed. We didn't know who to believe, Telstra or Alan.

Cathy wrote to you at this point, complaining that Telstra had left an open hole in the ground and it was particularly dangerous because there were children running around.

27th November

Around 8.30 am, Joe Austin, from Seal by Seal Tours, phoned to say he had heard a recorded message three times the day before, each time saying that our number was not connected. Tony Fielding from Telstra seemed to be blaming us for these problems but I told him that Telstra had advised us, the day before, that the severed cable had been fixed. Mr Fielding rang again to find out if things were OK and to advise us that he also had problems getting through on our line. He blamed us for not transferring the phone back from our mobile to our land line. We explained that we had done this the night before but it seemed, from complaints we were receiving, that our number (55 267 267) had now been diverted to another service altogether. Mr Fielding then said that whoever wrongly transferred our number would be dealt with by Telstra and he himself would find out how the mistake occurred.

At 19.52 we received another call but the disconnected signal was going when I picked up the receiver. When I pressed *10# there was no recorded message to say who rang. Why?

Late November

The day that Alan Smith came over to the camp and confronted another local Telstra technician also called Steven was instigated because this Telstra technician had stated words to the effect that Telstra was not liable to pay for the rewiring and extra

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9th December

Telstra completely rewired the kiosk, cutting away the loose wiring they said could very well have been causing all our problems including disconnecting and removing a junction. The new Telstra cabling box outside the kiosk was moved away from the electric power cable coming into the kiosk.

16th December

I tried to fax Julia Winter-Cooke, Hamilton College Camp coordinator, and couldn't get a fax through for the best part of the day, even though I left the fax on redial so that, if the college's fax line was engaged at first, my fax would have been sent eventually. On all these previous non-connected attempts to Ms Cooke, (documents can be provided confirming my accounts show I was charged a success fee for each non-connected fax). I described this problem to Tony Fielding from Telstra and he then attempted to send us a test fax but experienced problems himself. When the fax test sheet finally did come through, it confirmed a problem in that area as well. Mr Fielding then suggested we fax Telstra's fault centre in Tasmania on 1972081 – we tried numerous times to reach this number but we were never successful on any of these attempts. Tony Fielding then supplied another number to fax to and when we sent this new test fax on first attempt it supplied information (we have this copy) stating there was not enough time allowed in the transmission to correctly supply a reading.

I am sure you remember also, from my previous letter to you, that Telstra's Lorraine Rivette only received one fax from my office last September, when my fax journal shows two faxes going to her office in the space of ten minutes.

19th December

Tony Watson of Telstra began to make me feel as though I was causing the phone faults myself. At 4.00 pm I pressed the *10# code on my phone, only to find a call had come in from 9727 4405 at 10.39 am that morning. Why didn't my answering machine pick up this call?

In Summary

Telstra's CCAS data confirms 142 lost calls in November and fifty in December. The December records include eleven days before Telstra rewired the kiosk line and disconnected the alarm bell. Since then the number of complaints we have received from callers has reduced dramatically and, although we have continued to experience intermittent phone problems after 9th December 2002, and Telstra therefore needs to keep monitoring the line in the short term, the current problems are only minor in comparison.

Having previously investigated in the Cape Bridgewater and Portland region prior to purchasing the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp, rumors innuendoes etc about the phone problems experienced by Alan Smith was well known. It was our belief then that perhaps Alan's phone problems were detriment to the growth of the business as so was the reason we changed the name to Cape Bridgewater Coastal Camp. Unfortunately, due to the inherited phone problems with the local Telstra network including the wiring problems we are suffering similar ramifications to what Alan experienced due to these problems.



What is worrying us is that when schools, youth groups and other potential camp inquires connect to the internet for information about our new venue they are confronted with mountains of adverse publicity detailing past Telstra issues as though they are on going. This is extremely detrimental to the long-term growth of our business.

Should I also supply this information above to Telstra or Senator Alston's office or both perhaps you can advise me as soon as you have time?

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Darren and Jenny Lewis.

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