

AUSTEL
Alan Smith
Draft Report
Part 3

detail to explain the significance of Telecom's failure to adequately advise Mr Smith on matters relating to this issue.

Significance of RVA problem

- 80 The first written communication from Mr Smith to Telecom complaining of the RVA problem was on the 20 June 1992, following on from a fault report made by Mr Smith on 16 March 1993 complaining of this fault. The letter was addressed to the Hamilton Manager of Customer Services. Mr Smith's letter provides an insight into the significance of the RVA problem from the customer's perspective.
- 81 Mr Smith detailed in his letter how an English tourist had informed him of receiving an RVA message after attempting to call the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp from Melbourne a number of times in succession on a day in March 1992. The tourist had informed Mr Smith, after eventually getting through to him, that she had received a message stating that "This number is not connected." As the tourist had called Mr Smith the previous day from Adelaide, she knew that the camp was in operation and that the Camp number should be connected. The RVA message was obviously incorrect, the call should have been connected without any message being received by the calling party.
- 82 In the letter to the Hamilton Manager of Customer Services Mr Smith noted that he had received complaints of this RVA message prior to the report from the English tourist "but having had so many other complaints, I did not put two and two together." (The "other complaints" referred to by Mr Smith are the other faults he had experienced on his service.) Mr Smith stated in the letter that he had made some further inquiries on the RVA issue:
- Investigations to numerous sources, from which I had expected inquiries regarding literature which I had sent, all brought a similar reply. For the period: December 1991 to as late as April 1992, those ringing were told "This number is not connected?"*

- 83 After noting that his camp must meet certain criteria set by the Education Department to be listed as an approved excursion venue, Mr Smith went on to detail the potential damage to his reputation of the RVA message:

Five weeks ago a friend, in jest, said: "I'm glad to see that you've paid your phone bill". Those words, although said in fun, give a pretty accurate summation of the opinions derived upon hearing "This number is not connected." What effect does it have on the general public? What effect does it have upon prospective patrons? Would you recommend a venue which appears incapable of paying its bills?

- 84 Mr Smith was also concerned that if a group of teachers met and were discussing the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp comments may be made such as *"Steer clear of them! They can't even pay their phone bill."*
- 85 As Mr Smith points out, the RVA message had the potential to severely damage his business. An important point in relation to the possible financial impact of the RVA message on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service is the camp's dependence on group bookings. In June 1992 the camp tariffs ranged from \$1500 to \$6000 per week, so the loss of even one booking because of the RVA problem could mean a substantial financial loss. On calling up Directory Assistance a calling party would have been informed that the number was connected, but many callers would probably not have taken this action, accepting the contents of the RVA message at face value.

Range of possible causes of RVA's on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service

- 86 From examination of Telecom's documentation concerning RVA messages on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp there are a wide range of possible causes of this message. A list of known causes of RVA messages affecting the Camp is provided below, although this list may not identify all possible causes of RVA on the Camp services.

Incorrect Dialling of Cape Bridgewater Number

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- 87 In certain circumstances incorrect dialling of the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp number could produce an RVA message. Telecom documentation canvasses incorrect dialling as a possible cause of reports of RVA from callers trying to contact the Camp. A analysis from Telecom's undertaken by Telecom's National Networks Investigation states:

It is worth noting that, by calling 0055 267 26 we obtain a female Recorded announcement "The number you have called is not connected, please.....". It is therefore possible that some of the reported RVA may relate to mis-dialled numbers.³⁸

- 88 It should be noted, however, that most callers would be expected to check the number they have dialled and/or attempted a second or third call, which would minimise the potential of incorrect dialling as a source of reports of RVA's.

RVA's originating from Portland region due to 'intermittent digit storage problem' at Portland exchange

- 89 An "intermittent digit storage problem" was found in a register in the Portland exchange and repaired on 7 October 1992. This problem could cause either wrong numbers or RVA's on calls made from subscribers on ARK exchanges parented of the Portland exchange. Subscribers calling Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp from these regions could therefore have experienced RVA's when calling the camp, and, in fact, some subscribers did and reported the problem to Telecom.³⁹
- 90 On 24 November 1992 Telecom's Area Manager - Special Products - Commercial Vic/Tas wrote to Mr Smith and said that the "register" problem would have "affected a maximum of 1.5% of incoming calls between 2 October and 7 October 1992."⁴⁰ It is not clear how the

³⁸ Document entitled Analysis of 055 267 267 problem - from MS3

³⁹ Probably Savill and who else? - need to locate quotes or reword this - also important for setting time frame for duration of problem

duration or extent of the problem were so precisely identified, although the duration appears to be based on some fault reports from local subscribers in early October 1992. The analysis provided is challenged by a file note made by the Hamilton Manager of Customer Services after a conversation with Mr Smith on 5 October 1992:

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Mr Smith received a letter from a ladywho lives in Heywood. She claims (on) 22/9/92 (she) rang 267 267 between 10 and 11 am. Received RVA message this number is disconnected. Rang 267 267 25/9/92. Rang from 9.20 am onwards 7 times received RVA message, 2 times No Response, No Tones. (note: callers number was from 055 prefix region)

- 91 Other evidence also suggests the problem had existed for a longer period than a 5 day period as Mr Smith was informed. An undated note from a Technical Officer at the Portland exchange to the Manager, National Network Investigations - Melbourne discusses his investigation of the matter. The Technical Officer had contacted the Heywood caller, who had told him she had contacted another subscriber in Cape Bridgewater "on many occasions and sometimes she gets a recording (MALE)" stating the service had been disconnected. The officer went on to say:

We have had quite a few complaints from ARK-M customers (including HEYD) about this recording⁴¹

- 92 It appears that the RVA problem the Heywood caller was experiencing when calling Mr Smith and another subscriber in Cape Bridgewater was significantly greater than 1.5%, and had been in existence for some time. From the recent information provided by the Heywood caller via Mr Smith the problem had commenced at least 10 days earlier than the period Mr Smith was informed by Telecom. It should also be noted that the problem seems to be quite severe, at least from callers from the Heywood region.

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41 NNI file

- 93 Information provided by the Heywood caller suggests this particular RVA problem had almost certainly been in existence for a much longer period than a few weeks prior to the fault being repaired. A chronology of events on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp provided to AUSTEL by Mr Smith notes that the same Heywood caller had tried to contact him on 16 March 1992 and experienced an RVA when attempting to see if accommodation was available at the Camp for 12 guests at her premises seeking accommodation in the Cape Bridgewater area.⁴² 143
- 94 The letter provided by Telecom's Area Manager - Special Products - Commercial Vic/Tas is a further demonstration of Telecom's inability to co-ordinate customers' complaints...Mr Smith's faith in Telecom's fault investigation procedures and integrity must have been further eroded by a letter which minimised the extent and duration of the "relay" problem, particularly when the 5 day period of the problem which is admitted does not include dates identifying experience of the problem which Mr Smith had reported to Telecom.

Incorrect programming of Cape Bridgewater number code at Windsor Digital Trunk Exchange (MELU)

- 95 Of all the identified causes of RVA's on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service the most severe cause, in terms of the volume of incoming call traffic affected, was when the Cape Bridgewater number code data was not correctly programmed at the Windsor Digital Trunk Exchange (MELU). The length of period that this problem existed, however, is contentious. Telecom wrote to Mr Smith stating the problem occurred for a maximum of three weeks, whereas Mr Smith argues, from information provided to him by callers to the Camp, the problem existed for at least 4 months⁴³.
- 96 As detailed above, Mr Smith's knowledge of this RVA problem was first brought to his attention by an English tourist trying to contact the Camp in March 1992. From Telecom's LEOPARD fault data⁴⁴ the first

⁴²This call would not have trunked via MELU unless she called the 008 number, as call was a local call.

report made by Mr Smith complaining of the RVA was on 18 March 1992. LEOPARD records two prior reports of RVA from other Cape Bridgewater subscribers, with the first of these made on 4 March 1992.

- 97 Telecom's Area Manager - Special Products, Telecom Commercial Vic/Tas wrote to Mr Smith on 24 November 1992 providing information on the duration and cause of this particular RVA. This letter was the first written communication to Mr Smith providing details on the nature and duration of the problem. It was provided 8 months after the fault had been rectified, after numerous communications from Mr Smith concerning this matter. This letter stated:

A fault at Windsor exchange in Melbourne was caused by a network program change. This programming caused a network recorded message to be given to some callers, and affected incoming STD calls from Melbourne to Bridgewater for a period of up to 3 weeks prior to the fault being fixed. The maximum impact on your incoming STD calls from Melbourne, could have been up to 50% and would have depended on exchange traffic at the time of call attempts. The Windsor exchange was reprogrammed on 19 March 1992 and this has rectified the problem.⁴⁵

- 98 The time taken by Telecom to provide this information to Mr Smith indicated extreme negligence on this matter, particularly given the severity of the problem to the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service.
- 99 Telecom's argument for the maximum 3 week duration of this RVA problem is based on both customer fault reports and data number changes performed at the Windsor exchange. After seeking information from a number of sources this conclusion was reached by National Network Investigations (Melbourne) in a report dated 28 August 1992, over 5 months after the fault was rectified.⁴⁶ It is

⁴³³⁰ - 24 Nov 92 - from Smith says 9 months, but Smith originally said 4 months.

⁴⁴⁶²⁴ - COBPAK Adhoc Request - what is this?

assumed that this analysis was used as the basis for the letter to Smith of 24 November 1992 which stated that this problem had occurred 'for a period of up to 3 weeks.'

- 100 On 5 February 1993 the Manager - National Network Investigations (Melbourne) produced another report on the issues of RVA and NRR from the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp. This report was distributed to other National Network Investigations Managers, to the Manager - Tas/Vic Commercial Business, Commercial & Consumer Business, and to the Manager Warmambool Operations Management Group. In regard to the MELU RVA error, this report stated:

An exact period that this data error was effective for is difficult to obtain but analysis of MELU information indicates that the data change was in place for approximately 6 weeks.⁴⁷

- 101 In mid 1993 a briefcase containing file information was inadvertently left at Mr Smith's premises during a visit by Telecom National Networks Investigation personnel, and Mr Smith subsequently viewed the contents of his file, which contained the 5 February 1993 report. Mr Smith noticed the discrepancy in the duration of the MELU RVA problem, and alleged to AUSTEL that he had been mis-advised on this issue by Telecom. Telecom responded to AUSTEL stating that the 6 week period identified in this report was an error, and that the earlier 3 week estimate was correct.⁴⁸

NEW TELSTRA DOCUMENTS
SHOW 8 MONTHS

- 102 AUSTEL has also viewed some documentation relating to the period the data error at MELU was causing RVA on calls to Cape Bridgewater. The circumstantial evidence indicates the problem may have occurred for only 3 weeks, but no precise or definitive duration of the problem can be ascertained from the available data. A more accurate assessment of the duration of the problem would

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⁴⁸ 694 - Hew Macintosh for Manager - NNI - 28 August 1993

⁴⁷ NNI file - front page

undoubtedly have been assisted by a much earlier examination of the problem.⁴⁹

- 103 It is apparent from Telecom's documentation that no investigation of the duration of the MELU data error problem would have been initiated without the persistence of Mr Smith's complaints on the matter. It also follows that no investigation was intended into the circumstances which led to the error occurring. The lack of this process raises serious questions about Telecom's ability to ensure such errors are not repeated.
- 104 The assessment provided to Mr Smith that up to 50% of STD calls from Melbourne to the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp would have been affected by the MELU RVA problem appears to be accurate.

Conclusion

- 105 The advice provided to Mr Smith on matters relating to the RVA message caused by the data error at MELU was inadequate. The impression conveyed by Telecom's letter of 24 November 1992 to Mr Smith was that Telecom was certain of the maximum duration of the RVA problem, a certainty which is not conveyed by internal communications on the matter. It should be noted that the original advice provided to Mr Smith must be assessed in the context that Mr Smith had submitted a claim for compensation.
- 106 Telecom also failed to investigate the cause of the MELU RVA within a timeframe which would have assisted a more precise identification of the duration of the RVA problem. This was a failure to initially treat this issue with sufficient gravity.

RVA Problem for calls made from Public Payphones

- 107 Complaints of RVA have been received from callers using public payphones trying to contact the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Need to identify document which makes this claim

⁴⁹Documentation shown and discussed with Cliff Mathieson on 17/2/94.

⁵⁰see 18a - Macintosh to Exchange Managers.

Telecom tested for this fault, but was unable to substantiate whether it occurred. It is not clear how comprehensively Telecom tested this issue. It should be noted that there is conclusive, however, that Cut Offs to the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp from Public Payphones occurred because of incorrect data coding in the network. The documentation provided to AUSTEL is not conclusive on this issue, and provides little detail on the extent or nature of the problem.⁵¹ 147

Local technician's perception of existence of RVA problem

108 Mr Smith is sceptical of the advice provided to him by Telecom's senior management concerning the extent and duration of the RVA problems affecting the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service. A contributing factor to this scepticism was probably information provided to him by local Telecom technicians on the RVA fault.⁵² It should be noted that Telecom technicians regularly visited Mr Smith during mid 1992. An internal briefing history prepared in late 1992 described the technical service provided to Mr Smith over this period as catering "to Mr Smith's every whim."⁵³

109 The view of the local Telecom technicians in relation to the RVA problem is conveyed in a 2 July Minute from the Customer Service Manager - Hamilton to Managers in the Network Operations and Vic/Tas Fault Bureau. This Minute stated:

Our local technicians believe that Mr Smith is correct in raising complaints about incoming callers to his number receiving a Recorded Voice Announcement saying that the number is disconnected.

They believe that it is a problem that is occurring in increasing numbers as more and more customers are connected to AXE.⁵⁴

⁵¹Need to find more quotes if I leave this in.

⁵²Smith to substantiate this.

⁵³617 - Briefing History - Mr Alan Smith, Cape Bridgewater.

- 110 It should be noted that this statement is made over 3 months after the date when the MELU RVA problem has been rectified. Although field technicians are not necessarily in the best position to identify the cause of RVAs, they certainly receive a body of anecdotal evidence from customers of problems which they are experiencing.
- 111 It is clear that there was a certain level of perception by Telecom technicians that other customers in the region were also experiencing the RVA problem. This perception was probably based on other instances of data errors similar to that which affected the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp. One data error affected the Mt Richmond locality immediately adjacent to Cape Bridgewater, where after an upgrade to a digital exchange programming had not been changed from analogue to digital for calls switching to Mt Richmond via Melbourne's MELC exchange. This meant that calls switching via this exchange could not reach Mt Richmond. A July 1992 Telecom Minute from a Warrnambool technician which discusses both this error and the MELU RVA error notes: *"Both these problems were found a considerable time after the (exchange) cutovers."*⁶⁵
- 112 It should be noted that in reference to the Mt Richmond problem this problem had been in existence for at least 6 months after the exchange had been upgraded to a digital exchange. This demonstrates that fault reports alone are not necessarily a reliable indicator of the extent or duration of this type of problem.

Other Data Coding Problems

- 113 The July 1992 Minute from the Warrnambool technician notes other data coding problems occurring in his region. The Minute states

We have also had problems with ARK's parented off the Portland AXE not being able to get local customnet and 008 codes because the A-Number analysis for these exchanges were not in the data in the Warrnambool Node.

⁶⁴Mark Foss to Chris Doody and Graeme Davies - 628

⁶⁵Geoff McCann to Chris Doody 517

What concerns me is that with the number of ARK to AXE reparenting being carried out across the state how can we be sure of and who is going to check the A-Number and B-Number analysis, routing etc in all the Nodes throughout Victoria so that this does not become a major problem in the network.

I suggest to enable us to have confidence in the whole network that these problems have to be addressed and that checks should be performed in all Nodes across the state.

- 114 Mr Smith's 008 number did not begin operating until December 20 1992, so the reference to problems with data coding for 008 numbers in his region are not relevant in this instance. The broader concern raised by the author of this Minute as to an apparent failure to effectively co-ordinate programming of number data when upgrading to digital AXE technology is relevant. It is possible that calls to the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp were affected by this problem. It is also possible that this problem was the cause of some instances of RVA on calls to the Camp.⁵⁶
- 115 Some problems with incorrectly coded data seem to have existed for a considerable period of time. In July 1993 Mr Smith reported a problem with payphones dropping out on answer to calls made utilising his 008 number. Telecom diagnosed the problem as being to "Due to incorrect data in AXE 104, CC-1. Fault repaired by Ballarat OSC 8/7/93"⁵⁷ The original deadline for the data to be changed was June 14th 1991.⁵⁸ Mr Smith's complaint led to the identification of a problem which had existed for two years.
- 116 AUSTEL does not know how widespread the problem with incorrect coding of data was (or is) throughout the network. It should be noted that the data problems seem to coincide with an region being upgraded to digital technology.

⁵⁶Call to confirm

⁵⁷555 - 9 Sept 1993 - Rod Smith to Manager, Warrambool.

⁵⁸589 - K.Grant to various Manager - pre June 14 1991

Summary

- 117 There is no indication that the multiplicity of possible causes of RVA's on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp service were ever adequately explained to Mr Smith. A number of factors may have contributed to this failure, foremost of these being the length of time it took to identify some of the causes of RVA on the Camp service.
- 118 When Telecom wrote to Mr Smith on 24 November 1992 explaining two known causes of RVA on his service the information provided was inadequate. The duration of both RVA problems did not correspond with information Mr Smith had received from callers of their experience of RVA's when trying to contact the camp. Telecom's own internal documentation on the duration of both problems demonstrates that there was evidence that faulty relay problem almost certainly existed longer than stated, and that uncertainty exists on the duration of the MELU RVA problem.
- 119 Given the questionable information provided to Mr Smith on RVA's affecting his service and the delay in providing this information it is not surprising he questioned the explanations provided by Telecom when they arrived. Information received from local technicians would have compounded Mr Smith's perception of the problem.
- 120 The consequence of Telecom's failure to adequately advise Mr Smith on RVA problems affecting his service was that Mr Smith's faith in Telecom's integrity and capacity to resolve faults was severely undermined. Mr Smith was subsequently highly sceptical of Telecom's interpretation of faults on his service, and he undertook extensive inquiries within his industry and with people in contact with the Camp to try and ascertain the extent of the problems affecting the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp services.

Failure to advise of consequences of testing program

- 121 In July 1993 Mr Smith complained to Telecom that callers from payphones in his local region could not make contact with the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp. It transpired that the cause of this problem was specialised monitoring equipment then being used on

his line. The Telecom staff responsible for connecting the specialised equipment knew that the problem would occur through utilising this equipment, and failed to inform Mr Smith of this fact.

- 122 Mr Smith was only informed of the side-effect of the monitoring equipment when he complained of the fault. It is not sure to what extent this fault would have affected potential customers for the camp, or how many callers were affected by it. Mr Smith should have been appraised of the consequences of the use of the monitoring equipment, however, as it was ultimately his decision whether the possible benefits of the use of the monitoring equipment outweighed the potential loss of revenue from the loss of callers.

Failure to advise of Answer No Voice problem affecting Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp Service

- 123 Mr Smith began experiencing faults which related to a condition termed Answer No Voice in late 1992, although it is possible some earlier fault reports from Mr Smith also related to this condition.⁵⁹ Answer No Voice is defined in this instance as when the called party receives a burst of ring, but upon answering the call receives dial tone.
- 124 In February 1993 Mr Smith was communicating faults directly to Telecom's Commercial Vic/Tas area. A senior Telecom officer who was a regular Telecom contact for faults reported by Mr Smith noted the following fault report of 2 February 1993:

He (Mr Smith) received on burst of ring at 1.15 pm and 5.05 pm yesterday, when he picked up the receiver (sic) he heard dial tone. This problem occurs intermittently through-out the Network and although it is recognised as a problem there appears to be no one person or group involved in resolving it.⁶⁰

⁵⁹For corroboration - see Smith chronology - 289 - completed May 20 1993.

⁶⁰Customer complaint form print-out - Cape Bridgewater monitoring folder.

it was a problem caused by the AXE at Warmambool not having enough soft ware blocks released and this was to be done on 26/03/93. I then rang Mr Smith back and he accepted the explanation that it was not just him suffering the problem.⁶²

129 It appears that this fault was not as difficult to diagnose as originally thought, and the resolution of the fault pertained more to an incorrect structure of the local network serving the Portland region than an inexplicable nationwide fault condition. Of note is that at this time Mr Smith was obviously concerned that the fault was affecting his service alone, whereas if Telecom had made known to Mr Smith their knowledge of other people reporting the same problem Mr Smith would not have had this concern, and perhaps some of his frustration with his telephone problems would have been alleviated. A failure to acknowledge other people reporting the same fault also relieved the pressure on Telecom staff to deal with this problem at an early stage, and it seems that this problem was not diagnosed and rectified as quickly as it should have been.

130 On 8 April 1993 Mr Smith wrote to AUSTEL and referred to the apparent resolution of the Answer No Voice problem on his service.⁶³ Mr Smith maintained that it was only his constant complaints that had led Telecom to uncover this condition affecting his service, which he maintained he had been informed was caused by "increased customer traffic through the exchange." On the evidence available to AUSTEL it appears that it was Mr Smith's persistence which led to the uncovering and resolving of this problem - to the benefit of all subscribers in his area. The time taken for rectification of the fault by Telecom was excessive, particularly in relation to the assurances given to Mr Smith by the Service Manager, Telecom Commercial Vic/Tas on 1 September 1992 (letter previously quoted under Allegation (I)), stating that Telecom was:

a technical organisation capable of responding quickly and efficiently to a service difficulty should there be a need.

⁶²customer complaint form print-out - Cape Bridgewater monitoring folder.

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Allegation (III) Denial of existence of problem or its underestimation

- 131 From the customer complaints records it is evident that Telecom technical staff usually advised Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp in general terms of testing taken in response to faults/problems reported. What is not evident in any documentation is whether the customer was advised of how the testing addressed the faults being reported on a continuing basis or how the testing would isolate and thereby identify the causes of faults/problems being reported.
- 132 No documentation was found of Telecom effectively addressing the issue that many callers in the Cape Bridgewater area were reporting similar faults/problems as the camp. Despite continuing programs of test calls to Mr Smith's premises, no comprehensive surveys were conducted of other subscribers in the Cape Bridgewater area to examine problems they may be experiencing. When limited inquiries were made in the area, problems of faults were substantiated to a level which should have initiated further inquiries.
- 133 There was no documentation found where the results and significant findings of major investigations were advised to the camp apart from where information was specifically requested.
- 134 The approach adopted by senior executives of Telecom corresponding to the camp advising that the network was working satisfactorily, did not reflect the evidence available to Telecom that the camp was experiencing problems over an extended period of time.

RCM Faults on the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp Service

Background to Identification of RCM fault

- 135 On August 21 1991 a digital RCM was installed at Cape Bridgewater. The RCM was essentially the terminating exchange for the services delivered to the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp, and the final vital link in the network serving the Camp.

136 On 2 March 1993 a technician from the Pair Gains Support section of Telecom investigated the Cape Bridgewater RCM system. The reason for the investigation was the continuing complaints of service difficulties from Mr Smith. Apparently this was the first time specialised expertise was requested to assess the operation of the RCM. This raises questions about the basis for the service assurances provided to Mr Smith in late 1992.

137 It seems that an important contributing factor in Telecom initiating a thorough investigation of the operation of the RCM was a Telecom officer's own experience of service difficulties when conversing with Mr Smith. This officer, whom Mr Smith was regularly reporting faults to in early 1993, noted the following information on 24 February 1993:

Had a call from (Telecom employee) to say a Ballarat customer of A Smith had put a fault in via 1100 indicating she could not get through.....I attempted to ring Mr Smith when the ring tripped I received a noise similar to "carrier noise" and a very faint "hello" after waiting a while the person at the other end hung up. ⁶⁴

138 The officer later successfully connected a call to Mr Smith, who informed the officer that a "several people had rung and reported the same problem.". The Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp services 267 267 and 267 230, which were both located in one of the three RCM systems, were immediately taken out of this system and located in each of the remaining two RCM systems. The next day the officer requested that the local region call in specialised assistance to assess the operation of the RCM. It appears that the Telecom officer's own experience of the problem held considerably more weight than the numerous reports previously made by Mr Smith to this officer and his colleagues.

139 It should be noted that some minor actions had been performed by local Telecom staff on the RCM prior to the request for specialised assistance. A card in the RCM dedicated to the Cape Bridgewater

⁶⁴Telecom Customer Complaint Form

Holiday Camp service had been swapped with another card on the 10 February 1993 to see if a faulty card was a possible source of Mr Smith's problems. Mr Smith continued, however, to make fault reports after the swap.

140 The specialist assessment of the RCM was performed by an officer from the Pair Gains Support Section of the National Switching Support (Melbourne) group on 2 March 1993. A Minute dated 12 July 1993 discusses the findings of the Pair Gains Support officer in regard to the Cape Bridgewater RCM. (It should be noted that AUSTEL's investigation of matters relating to the RCM problem has been hampered by Telecom's failure to make available to AUSTEL a file specifically relating to the Pair Gains Support investigation of the RCM. This file was requested by AUSTEL on 9 February 1994.)

141 The 12 July 1993 Minute details a number of problems which were found at the Cape Bridgewater RCM in March 1993. (The fact that this Minute was written some three months after the investigation clearly indicates that the author was working from notes or other documents made at the time which have not been provided to AUSTEL). The problems identified in the RCM were:

- error counter readings for incoming calls to Cape Bridgewater indicated that on System 1 of the RCM there were a significant number of "degraded minutes" and "errored seconds", although the indicator of most severe problems, "severely errored seconds", read zero. Until 24 February 1993 the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp was located in System 1 of the RCM.
- "the presence of 500 Hz. noise on all lines at -58 dBm causing minor noise problems."⁶⁵
- "cable ducts into both the cross connect cabinet and the concrete hut were (sic) not sealed allowing the ingress of moisture, which could affect the error counters"

- *"the alarm system on all three RCM systems had not been programmed. This would have prevented any local alarms being extended back to Portland."*
- *strapping records for the RCM could not be located, so that testing of the "inground repeaters using the "trios" system" could not be performed*
- *"a problem with the installation of the enhanced lightning protection modules in the IDS block at Cape Bridgewater was discovered"*

- 142 The RCM system was monitored overnight and analysis the next day revealed that System 1 was running a high number of "degraded minutes" and "errored seconds". The problem with the lightning protection module was discovered and rectified, and the error counters were monitored after the next night and no errors were recorded .
- 143 The officer who wrote the 12 July Minute noted that when he had been called in to conduct the investigation he had been informed *"of a vocal customer at Cape Bridgewater complaining of VF (very frequent)cut-offs in one direction."* After noting the readings from the RCM error counters, he commented *"these errors could have caused the VF cut-off problem."*
- 144 AUSTEL has raised the issue of the significance of the RCM error counter readings with Telecom. The Group General Manager Customer Affairs wrote to AUSTEL on 18 February 1994 stating:

The effect of the Errored Seconds and Degraded Minutes may cause some degradation of the voice services, manifesting itself as low level noise (eg "clicks). The zero count of Severely Errored Seconds confirms that there was a low probability of any call drop out or impact on the ability to receive or make calls.⁶⁶

- 145 The response from the Group General Manager Customer Affairs clearly downgrades the potential severity of the *"VF cut-off problem"* at

⁶⁶Back to MacMahon - 18 Feb 1994 - Page 2.