



“The little guy is trampled on by phone companies”

MOBILE TOWERS MUST BE MORE TIGHTLY REGULATED. SAYS KATE ELLIS

THE development of mobile phone technology has changed our lives and become a vital tool for many of our communications with family, friends and business associates.

I, for one, confess that I would be at a total loss without my dear mobile phone which is so regularly pressed up to my ear.

The advent of mobile phone technology has also posed a number of challenges though, particularly with the necessary accompanying mobile phone towers which now scatter our neighbourhoods.

The placement of mobile phone towers may not be the sexiest issue in Federal politics at the moment, but it is often these grassroots local issues which have immediate impacts on nearby residents. Too often they are overlooked.

I have been contacted by many residents who are either worried about the health impacts of such towers, or they are concerned about the ugly appearance of many of these structures and the impact that it may have on their local property prices.

Upon closer examination I discovered that the laws governing these towers are flawed and in dire need of a rewrite. Far too often the community and indeed the local councils just do not get to have their say and these decisions are made outside of the democratic process. The little guy gets trodden on by the powerful telecommunications companies.

Clearly it is ridiculous that you need planning approval to build a new fence or chop down a tree but the phone carriers often do not – even when constructing their towers near sensitive locations like childcare centres, schools or hos-

pitals.

Does it really make sense that local communities are consulted over local liquor licence applications but are often not when phone towers are being built alongside their children's childcare centres?

It is plainly stupid that a mobile phone tower that is larger than 5 metres must be subjected to a local government planning process but mobile phone carriers can put 5, 10 or 15 towers that are each just under 5 metres tall on the one building without any such local decision-making.

I was compelled to act on this issue after being contacted by a number of concerned residents. They were worried and angry that they had no say in the placement of these towers in their neighbourhoods.

After repeatedly calling upon the Federal Government to act and having these calls fall on deaf ears, this week, I introduced a Private Members Bill to the Parliament.

It seemed to spark a fair bit of media attention along the way and not surprisingly, strident opposition from the big phone carriers who seek to protect the easy ride that they currently enjoy.

While I was well aware of local residents' concerns in Adelaide, it wasn't until I appeared on the *Sunrise* program that I started to receive letters, emails and phone calls from people from across the country.

Clearly this is an issue which touches many, particularly when these often ugly and imposing towers are built in sensitive locations, without any community or local government decision making power whatsoever.

MY Bill seeks to amend the Telecommunications Act to tighten the regulatory pro-

cess surrounding the placement of mobile phone towers. Basically it seeks to give local residents the voice that they deserve.

As a result of the current flawed laws, massive clusters of so-called “low impact” towers continue to spring up in our communities, without local council input and state government planning permission and often against the will of local occupants.

In the electorate of Adelaide, one suburban roof is covered by, at last count, over sixteen towers. Because each tower is just under five metres tall, by law it is still regarded as low impact. It's a ridiculous situation and the local enraged residents deserve better.

My Bill seeks to bring these clusters of mobile phone towers into the high impact category so that more stringent planning approval processes will apply. It will also give residents a say in the placement of towers which are located alongside schools, hospitals and child care centres.

I'm calling on the Howard Government to debate the Bill and stand with the residents who are effectively being shut out of the democratic process when it comes to the construction of these towers in their communities.

The advent of new technologies will continue to pose new challenges for our communities. It is for this reason that we need a fresh and energetic government who'll work to ensure that the laws keep up. Sadly on this issue, as on so many others, the Howard Government has once again dropped the ball.

Kate Ellis (ALP) is the federal MP for the seat of Adelaide



URBAN BLIGHT: Communities need more say in mobile phone tower placement