

## Issue

Next G Wireless Link (Next G WL) will replace CDMA Wireless Local Loop (WLL) when it is proven that Next G provides equivalent or better coverage and services than the CDMA Network. After that point, customers seeking (at least) a standard telephone service will have two options available:

- Uptake Next G Wireless Link (WL), or
- Uptake a service under the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

## Legislative Instruments

### Universal Service Obligation (USO)

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) is an obligation placed on universal service providers to ensure that standard telephone services, payphone and prescribed carriage services are reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business.

### Customer Service Guarantee (CSG)

The Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) standard is a performance standard issued by the Australian Communications and Media Authority pursuant to the *Telecommunications Act 1999*. The CSG standard, which applies to standard telephone services, specifies certain requirements including timeframes for the connection of services, the repair of faults and the making and keeping of appointments which carriage service providers must adhere to.

## Next G WL

It is important to note that Next G WL is a mobile service, not a standard fixed telephone service, and as such, will not be covered by the USO or the CSG. The Association understands that members are concerned about the impacts of power outages over long periods of time (2-3 days); the compatibility of faxes with Next G WL; and about future pricing arrangements. The Association has been advised that:

- Telstra is under no obligation to provide power supply.
- Customers will be responsible for the provision of power and any ongoing maintenance and costs of the battery back-up for Next G WL. However, Telstra has indicated that *where the new Next G WL unit will be set up in an existing external CDMA WLL housing, no change to the current arrangements for operation and maintenance of the solar panels and associated battery power supplies will occur*. The Association urges members to verify your individual circumstances and rights with Telstra.
- Telstra will provide back-up power packs (internal battery back-up) for a nominal cost of \$1 (limited to one per customer) that will enable Next G WL to operate over a 24-hour period (or approximately 1 hour of talk time) using battery power. Members need to ensure they request this \$1 back-up battery option upon discussion of Next G WL contract with Telstra.
- Battery packs have an estimated life of five years and a wholesale cost of approximately \$400.
- Power outages beyond 24 hours will need to be plugged into a 12V DC outlet (cigarette lighter).
- Call costs will be dependent upon the pricing plan that you agree to upon accepting the Next G WL service. Telstra has indicated that these costs will be at the same rates as Telstra's current HomeLine or BusinessLine voice plans.
- Data costs associated with Next G WL are likely to be higher than those outlined under the Australian Broadband Guarantee ([www.broadbandnow.gov.au](http://www.broadbandnow.gov.au)).

## Fixed Telephone Service Under the USO

- Telstra is currently the sole universal service provider. Telstra has stated that "it remains committed to fulfilling its Universal Service obligation and will provide customers with a service based on the individual circumstances of customers who request a service under these conditions."
- The Association encourages members to discuss any concerns regarding the Next G WL service with Telstra; and if you are not adequately satisfied that the service meets your needs, you have the right to request a fixed service under the USO from the universal service provider. This service will then be covered under both the USO and CSG. Fixed services under the USO may be delivered via a range of different technologies, most likely satellite technology.

### **Satellite Technology**

- The Association is concerned that a USO service, as an alternative to Next G WL, has not been sufficiently promoted and should be fully considered by members migrating from CDMA WLL.
- Some members have mentioned problems with satellite voice service, such as delays and variability in voice quality, however, the guidelines for standard telephone services (STS) under the USO (which includes satellite voice services) state that quality of voice must be appropriate so that an intelligent conversation can be held over the line (including guidelines pertaining to echoes etc). The USO provider has a responsibility to ensure these voice quality guidelines are met.
- USO guidelines for STS also require 24-hour access to emergency service numbers free of charge. The Association understands that this guideline should be sufficient to ensure that the USO provider is responsible for battery supply and maintenance requirements.
- The Association understands that call costs associated with Satellite services under the USO will be the same as current CDMA WLL costs.

### **Key Contacts**

- ① Telstra's Next G Issues Hotline (launched 21 January 2008) – freecall 1800 888 888
- ① Federal Government's Next G Customer Support Unit – freecall 1800 883 488
- ① Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman – freecall 1800 062 058
- ① NSW Farmers Association's Farm Communication Representatives – freecall 1800 009 679 (members only)