

Legality; Tower Height

The proposed tower grossly exceeds the current 9m height limit. This height limit is critically important for the maintenance of the Brunswick Heads lifestyle and the prevention of Gold Coast type developments. I'm not alone in believing that the views back from the breakwater of tree and sky with hills behind and no building in sight is wonderful and peaceful.

If Telstra are allowed to build a 30m tower, then presumably every other Telco will want one as their coverage is no better than Telstra and generally worse.

No one can deny that a mobile phone tower is ugly and doubtless a developer could put forward a sound argument that an architecturally designed 30m block of units would be more attractive. Given the shortage of land and the pent-up demand for properties in Brunswick Heads pressure for higher rise developments will occur. This can only be resisted if the current height limit is maintained for all structures.

Should Council not reject the application outright based on the height then it must consult widely with the Community. Few people I have spoken with were even aware of this application and I only, by chance, picked up the Byron News as it is not delivered to us.

Need.

In the application Telstra indicate a pressing need for the tower based on current call failure rates and future demand.

Based on the Telstra coverage map and my own experience there is no problem with the Telstra coverage. Even though we live on the edge of the coverage there has never been a time when a call has failed or dropped out. As an Emergence Rescue Volunteer I am paged by SMS and the only time I or any other member have had delays in receiving messages has been during the Splendour or Falls Festivals. These, however, are massive extra numbers of mobile phone users that should be mandatorily catered for by mobile towers at the site.

There is no Telstra coverage on their maps, and in reality, near the Gulgarn Rd. / Mullumbimby Rd. junctions. This suggest any tower should be on the Mullumbimby side of the Motorway.

Telstra consider extra numbers of people and higher data use to be imminent. Extra numbers of people won't happen as Brunswick is full at Xmas and Easter and there is no way of being overfull. With the imminent arrival of the NBN, then many people who currently use mobiles because of the high cost of a landline may switch to VOIP with their internet thus reducing the demand on mobile services.

A compelling need for an overheight tower in Brunswick Heads has not been established.

Location and Impact

Aurecon on behalf of Telstra have admitted that no one wanted their tower having investigated and had rejected a number of alternatives. The fact that Brunswick Bowling Club have agreed to house the tower leads them to minimise the impact and make the best of the only site they can find.

The fact remains that the entry statement to Brunswick Heads from the most popular South will be the top of the mobile phone tower – not a good look. The applicant has provided some depictions of the tower from two positions on Old Pacific Highway, but where else can it be seen from? As the applicant requires the 30m for line of sight to the relevant mobile phones, so also will there be line of sight back to the tower. Will it be visible from the pedestrian bridge over Simpsons Creek or the Breakwater perhaps?

The subject of health impacts of mobile phone towers is controversial. The applicant states “*there is no substantial evidence that exposure to low level radiofrequency EME causes adverse health effects*”. This is not the same as saying there cannot be any effects and in any case of uncertainty “*precautionary principles*” should apply. These demand that any siting of a mobile phone tower should be at a site that minimises exposure.

The Industry Code also has the objective of “*avoiding community sensitive locations*”.

The skate park and playing fields are community sensitive locations.

Telstra admit that one site near the Brunswick Heads Primary School was rejected on being too close to the school, but they want to put a tower close to where hundreds of children play regularly on the skate park or at sports on the adjoining ovals. If there are any unknown future impacts from long term exposure then the most vulnerable are children and every effort should be made to minimise that.

The playing fields are also used by the Rescue Helicopter as the best landing site for collecting patients from Brunswick Heads. They also should be advised of this proposal given the height of the tower.

Finally, the applicant dismisses the area for koala habitat, but as our property is within the koala habitat area I would be surprised if the Brunswick Bowling Club is not.

If Telstra are serious that Brunswick Heads will be severely disadvantaged if it doesn't provide more mobile infrastructure then it should work with Byron Shire Council to find the right solution.

It seems to me the most obvious place to put a mobile phone tower would be in the carpark adjacent to the off ramp of the motorway on the Mullumbimby side. This might relieve the black spot on Mullumbimby Rd., would have minimal impact given the street lights and other structures adjacent, and would be a considerable distance from the playing fields.

My understanding from the application was that a 9m or less tower would be sufficient if located within Brunswick Heads. One site that wasn't considered was the Council owned land occupied by the Brunswick Volunteer Rescue (of which I am secretary) in Byron St. where there is currently a radio aerial for VHF communication. If this was replaced by a short mobile phone tower, then most of the tower would be hidden by the truck shed and its location backing onto the reserve would limit the visual impact.

Summary

In my opinion the applicant has not demonstrated sufficient need for a 30m mobile phone tower to even consider amending the height legislation to allow it.

The proposed site is the only one they could get permission for from the owners and has severe visual impacts as well as being undesirably close to children's play activities.

If the applicant is serious about needing extra infrastructure it should work with Council on alternative sites. Two have been proposed.