

We The People
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We the People 238 Copper Failures



Good day to you. I had a very interesting call from a fellow at Currumbin recently by the name of Chris McCallum. He lives in a lovely leafy street just off Currumbin Creek Road. Chris tells me he has worked in the audio engineering and television field for many years and now runs his own freelance business as a sound recordist. This involves all kinds of work often to record sound for documentary shoots and often in very remote places. He has an interesting life and represents a bloke having a go and free enterprise at its best. If he doesn't work he doesn't get paid. Chris McCallum has a 7 year old daughter who he dotes on and even though he travels, much of his spare time is spent with her, as it should be. Using modern communications and technology allows him to work from home in terms of processing audio for the client once back from location.

Now you have a picture of his situation you can understand his frustration and anger when his phone calls go to the next door neighbour during rain periods. His phone and internet fail completely without warning and regularly and especially during rain or high humidity. It's just unpredictable. So he calls Telstra and they come out and usually tell him the copper wires are so fragile and corroded that they are unrepairable and new cable must be pulled into the street. This of course never happens. Now his daughter has a medical problem which makes the phone a further necessity and yet he must rely only on his mobile phone as the land line is next to useless. Chris is not on his own as the story is retold across the Gold Coast and Australia and even though the future may hold fibre optics one day, this too will age. Even when working, his internet is so slow its more efficient for him to save his audio work to a USB memory stick and mail it to the client rather than emailing. In 2017 that is unacceptable especially when relying on Australia Post.

I looked into all this and the history is complex but in short, Telstra sold their backbone network to the NBN people for billions of dollars. How come when they sold it we didn't receive some money or a credit as we the people paid for it, then again, clearly I don't get it. The copper network is aging but not so according to the then Telstra CEO David Thodey who said... *"the copper wire network had been going well for 100 years and would keep going for another 100. There's some copper that's a lot older than others but copper does not decompose,"*. That was a very misleading statement and certainly constituted misdirection. Copper does last well in the natural environment but remember, to save money the copper wires in the last decade have been made so very thin they can simply break when bent. The real culprit however is an electro-chemical reaction where the copper conductor reacts in the presence of the DC exchange voltage which turns the copper a blue green colour called verdigris. This together with the now very thin copper causes the failures. It does not bode well for the NBN 'fibre to the node' using the copper network to finally reach the home.

So here is where reality meets politics. The politicians and Telstra says the copper network is just fine and well maintained, well no its not. There are many junction boxes and pits where the cable unions look more like a complex afro hair do than a properly maintained electrical interchange. Insulation failures occur and connections are often not water proof. The very same thing applies to my home phone as well in Robina. In desperation Chris McCallum wrote to his local federal member for McPherson, Karen Andrews. She has promised to act on the matter and so we will see. I will report back to listeners without fear or favour what the outcome is regarding this matter and therefore how well Ms Andrews deals with the issue. I trust it's a better response than my representations about the pension theft and the over 65's.

Eventually let's hope Chris McCallum can get on with his life with a reliable phone and internet service soon, else yet another small business suffers at the hand of incompetent bureaucracy and government which refuses to believe a problem even exists. I've placed pictures on the Sentinel web site showing typical junction pits for your interest. We live in interesting times indeed and where vigilance is essential.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley

Pictures follow





