

COUNTRY ALLIANCE

MEDIA RELEASE

(Embargoed until 6am Monday 5 September)

‘No Sale of Telstra’ stickers ring true for country folk

Country Alliance has called upon coalition politicians representing regional, rural and outer suburban electorates to put their constituents before ideology by voting against the sale of the rest of Telstra.

“With more than 70 per cent of the electorate opposed to the sale it is clear that the Coalition does not have a mandate to sell off the rest of Telstra”, spokesman Russell Bate said.

Country Alliance is distributing “No Sale of Telstra” bumper stickers for people who want to remind the Government that they do not have a ‘mandate’ to sell off the rest of Telstra.



(image downloadable from www.countryalliance.org)

“People have to be able to have their say and this is one way they can do it,” Mr Bate said.

“Politicians must be reminded that we elect them to represent us, and not to force on us what they think is good for us.

“John Howard has been trying to convince us to accept his ideological position on this issue since he became Prime Minister in 1996 and he has still not convinced the Australian people”.

Mr Bate said the coalition could not use winning control of the Senate to justify their actions.

“Nor can the Nationals hide behind the proposed \$3 billion dollar deal to justify selling out their constituents”.

“\$3 billion is not much more than the Government received in dividends from Telstra last year and anyone who believes that the earnings from the Future Fund will guarantee that services in regional, rural and outer suburban areas will be comparable in quality, range and price with those of metropolitan areas is sadly mistaken”, he said.

Mr Bate said that the Universal Service Obligation did not provide sufficient protection, especially with respect to future technology.

“While the Act states that the object of the USO is to ensure that the standard telephone service, payphones, prescribed carriage services and digital data services are reasonably accessible to all Australians on an equitable basis, ‘wherever they reside or carry on business’ it currently only provides that a digital data service of at least 64 kbps is available to all Australians. It does not include the provision of broadband.

“The provision of broadband data services to rural Australians is critical for the delivery of essential education and health services and to enable rural businesses to operate on a competitive basis. When the USO was framed in 1999, 64 kbps was seen as a reasonable service level, today it is totally inadequate. Even if it were possible to deliver some level of broadband services to rural Australia within the budget proposed, does anyone seriously believe that the Future Fund will offer sufficient funding to permit upgrading those services to meet the requirements of 2010 let alone 2020” he said.

“Access to communications and information is not a luxury it is a necessity. If Australians living in regional and rural Australia and outer suburbs are not to become the new information ‘have nots’ then Telstra must remain in public ownership”

Stickers can be purchased from Country Alliance’s website.