

Copper, Fibre, or Wireless?

By *Beate Matthies*, Chair, *Auckland District Council of Social Services*

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The other day I listened in to a Parliamentary Debate in which the Communications Minister *Simon Bridges* aimed to improve the *Telecommunications Act* and modernise the communications sector.

The words ‘improve’ and ‘modernise’ point already in the direction we are led. Who wants to be satisfied with a situation that could be improved, and who doesn’t want to upgrade and modernise when it is possible?

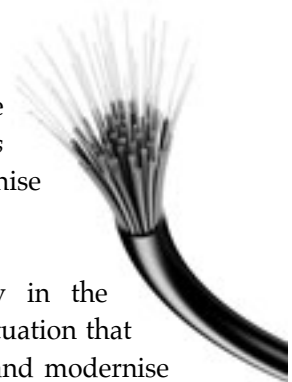
Yet, while the debate was unfolding, aspects were brought up that threw shadows on the intended improvements and modernisation.

In an article on the *TVNZ* website¹, the issue was summed up with the words:

“Industry lobbies largely welcomed the introduction of the legislation, although *Telecommunications Users Association New Zealand* chief executive *Craig Young* said it didn’t address “the inequality of resourcing for consumer voice research and advocacy that exists in New Zealand when compared to other jurisdictions such as Australia.”

At first glance, some of the arguments seem contradictory, but once it is clear that the fibre and wireless networks are much faster than the old copper network (the latter is the only one that is currently reaching parts of the country that fibre optic cables do not) the issue of cabling becomes suddenly a social justice issue.

1. www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/telecommunications-price-regulation-bill-tabled-in-parliament



I think that this is a good example for our decision-making process when it comes to voting at the next General Election.

There are many “burning” issues in our New Zealand society: affordable housing, suicide rates, child poverty, environment, and many others. None of these issues can be solved easily and unless they are tackled with the awareness that they are all inter-connected, there won’t be any improvements.

The fact that social issues are connected also means that if the Government reduces its support for one organisation, this can have a huge impact on the results or outcomes of another organisation.

For example, if there is not adequate support for a person with mental health problems, this person might offend and go to prison, and this would mean that the prison needs more support to cope with additional people. At the same time, the offender’s children might be neglected and are more likely to live in an unstable environment.

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We remember *Elvis Presley* and his song from 1969 *In the Ghetto* in which he refers to this kind of vicious circle. He finishes with the verse "... and the world turns" – and the same sad stories are repeated for the next generation.

Every General Election is a special opportunity for us to participate actively in our society and to look beyond our own needs. We are voting in Auckland, but the results of the Elections will have an impact on the whole country.

With the example of the cabling in mind, we could say that if we are living in an area where fibre cabling is accessible and working well, we should not easily discard copper cabling on which others might depend.
