

# How TasGRN will improve communications in Tasmania's Southwest.



Long-serving Hydro Tasmania employee, Brett Brady, recounts an on-site medical emergency, a situation that the increased communication coverage from the TasGRN could have improved.





**T**he new TasGRN will increase coverage and voice clarity in even the most remote areas of Tasmania.

This is music to the ears of Hydro Tasmania's Brett Brady, an employee of 38 years who looks after the Strathgordon power station.

The South West of Tasmania is remote and rugged. A picturesque drive, but the beautiful scenery has a downside; there's no mobile phone coverage for the last eighty kilometres of the journey.

**"THE ROUGH TERRAIN CERTAINLY HAMPERS OUR COMMUNICATION WITH THE TEAM.**

**COMPLICATING THAT, YOU CAN HAVE INCLEMENT WEATHER AND TREES ON THE ROAD AT ANY TIME. WE EVEN HAVE SNOW IN DECEMBER!"**

Unfortunately, the TasGRN won't be able to help with snow in December, But, coverage limitations will be a thing of the past when it is switched on.



Working remotely on the Gordon Dam can be a little isolating at the best of times. The lack of communications coverage in the area only contributes to it as well.

**"WE OFTEN FIND OURSELVES WORKING ALONE. AS A RESULT, WE ALWAYS MAKE SURE THAT SOMEONE KNOWS WHERE WE ARE GOING AND GIVE THEM A TIME-FRAME FOR OUR ARRIVAL AT OUR DESTINATION."**

Brett likens it to the old days, when he would conduct site visits, ringing the site as he left home to let them know he was on the way. The person on site had no idea if he was still travelling or had broken down until he arrived. As for the family at home, they were in the same boat until he returned home or called from the site.

The new TasGRN will increase coverage and voice clarity in even the most remote regions of Tasmania, which will assist all Hydro Tasmania employees working on those areas.

**B**rett recalls an event from the past where his colleague had suffered a case of vertigo and needed appropriate medical attention.

**"A YOUNG GRADUATE HAD DRIVEN UP TO INSPECT THE SCOTT'S PEAK DAM WITH US. UNFORTUNATELY, HE FELT A BIT CAR SICK WHEN THEY ARRIVED, SO WE LEFT HIM RECOVERING IN THE CAR WHILE WE COMPLETED THE INSPECTION. BUT, THINGS GOT A BIT MORE SERIOUS WHEN HE COULDN'T WALK DUE TO HIS DIZZINESS, AND HE CERTAINLY COULDN'T DRIVE HOME TO HOBART IN THAT CONDITION."**



At the time, Brett knew it was serious. Still, he didn't realise that his colleague was suffering from a case of vertigo, which is the feeling that your environment is moving or spinning around you, despite physically remaining still. As luck had it, their location near Scott's Peak is a notorious radio coverage black spot

**"WE'VE GOT THE OLD TRUNK MOBILE RADIOS, BUT ON THE MAIN ROAD IN THE FORESTED AREAS, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHERE YOU CAN PULL UP TO HAVE A CONVERSATION. ONCE YOU'RE OFF THE MAIN ROAD TO HEAD TO SCOTT'S PEAK, THERE ARE REALLY ONLY TWO RELIABLE SPOTS WHERE YOU CAN GET A RADIO CALL OUT. SOMETIMES IT'S PROBABLY A GOOD FORTY TO FIFTY-MINUTE DRIVE TO GET PHONE RECEPTION ON THE GRAVEL ROAD."**

**W**ith no regular communication options available to him, Brett had to try another method. He had recently been issued with a satellite phone to address the lack of coverage in the area, and the situation he found himself in was the perfect time to test it out.

With some perseverance, Brett was able to communicate his position; Ambulance Tasmania was able to pinpoint the location as the Edgar Dam campground.

**"IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D USED A SATELLITE PHONE TO CALL FOR AN AMBULANCE. YOU ACTUALLY CALL AN INTERNATIONAL CALL CENTRE THAT TRANSFERS YOU TO A LOCAL EMERGENCY OPERATOR. WE WERE TRYING TO EXPLAIN WHERE WE WERE TO SOMEONE OVERSEAS. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A TOWN NAME AND WE WERE WELL OVER A HUNDRED KILOMETRES FROM ANY TOWN!"**

**"EVENTUALLY, THEY SORT OF WORKED OUT WHERE WE WERE, AND THEY DISPATCHED THE AMBULANCE; THEN, IT WAS RADIO SILENCE. FOR TWO HOURS, WE DID OUR BEST TO LOOK AFTER OUR COLLEAGUE, HOPING THE AMBULANCE WOULD ARRIVE. WE HAD NO ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE TEAM IN TRANSIT; ALL WE COULD DO WAS USE THE SATELLITE PHONE TO CALL BACK THROUGH TO AMBULANCE TASMANIA. THEY ASSURED US THAT IF THERE WERE ANY ISSUES, CALL."**

**T**he team had to split up to ensure that the satellite phone had reception to accept incoming calls. One team member had to wait outside in the rain because the day shelter they were using to care for their colleague was blocking any remaining satellite reception they had.

Keeping an eye on the time, hoping that the Ambulance could find them, the team sent a lookout to the road to ensure that the Ambulance didn't miss them.

**"IT WAS A BIT FRUSTRATING, IN THIS DAY AND AGE WITH GPS AND THE LIKE, WE WERE USING OLD SCHOOL METHODS INSTEAD OF THEM BEING ABLE TO PINPOINT OUR EXACT LOCATION."**

Another cause for concern during the two-hour wait, there was no way to update the paramedics on their colleague's condition or receive advice on how best to care for him.

**"WE KNEW HOW TO KEEP HIM COMFORTABLE AND WERE PREPARED TO DO CPR, IF NEEDED. BUT THE SITUATION WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED IF WE'D HAD DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE AMBO'S TO PASS ON ANY ADVICE ALONG THE WAY."**

The TasGRN won't be a fix-all, but with improved voice clarity, and coverage, everyone involved can remain informed:

**"OUR STRESS LEVELS WERE HIGH. KNOWING WHERE THE AMBULANCE WAS WOULD HAVE HELPED REDUCE THEM. SLIPPERY GRAVEL ROADS ARE DANGEROUS. IF THE AMBULANCE HAD BEEN IN AN ACCIDENT, WE WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN."**

As for Brett, he is most looking forward to the simplest of things,

**"I'LL BE ABLE TO PICK UP A RADIO AND GO OUT ON A JOB, TELL SOMEONE WHERE I AM GOING, UPDATE THEM ON MY PROGRESS, AND LET THEM KNOW WHEN I AM BACK. CONSTANT CONTACT, NO MORE GUESSWORK, AND THAT'S PEACE OF MIND FOR ME, MY COLLEAGUES, AND MY FAMILY."**

