



📷 Cottage Point Kiosk owners Trent and Angela Wilson and daughter Sia. Photo: Adam Ward.

Manly

Cottage Point: The Sydney suburb technology forgot with limited internet or mobile phone coverage

Robbie Patterson, Manly Daily
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WELCOME to the Sydney suburb trapped in the dark ages.

Business owners and residents at Cottage Point say limited mobile phone and internet reception mean it is the town the 21st Century left behind with.

New safety concerns and business frustrations have now rekindled a decade-long appeal to bring it up to speed.

The only hope is for a telecommunications tower to be built through Federal Government mobile black spot funding, which would provide the infrastructure necessary for reliable coverage.

The suburb, on the fringe of the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, is just 29km as the crow flies from the Sydney CBD.

But, as well as dodgy phone and internet reception, it is without public transport, water, sewerage, garbage collection and kerb and guttering.

The dire technological state has prompted the local Marine Rescue to issue a warning that if the mobile black spot is not fixed, there will almost certainly be a death on the water.



📷 Marine rescue NSW Unit Commander Paul Millar, Mackellar MP Jason Falinski John Spry (Commodore of Ku-ring-gai Motor Yacht Club). Photo: Adam Ward.

Meanwhile, a lack of speedy internet is crippling local businesses who have been unable to adapt to technological advancements such as clouds, and app technology.

“It has the worst mobile phone reception in Sydney,” said Mackellar MP Jason Falinski, who has campaigned in Parliament for funding for the tourism hotspot.

Cottage Point Marine Rescue commander Paul Millar said the ability to use mobile phones on the water could mean the difference between life and death.

“If it is a bad day by way of reception because of cloud cover we won’t get (radio signal to) our base,” Mr Millar said. “The only option we have got is to then keep going until we can find reception.

“If it takes 10 minutes, that 10 minutes could be somebody’s last point of being on this

earth.”



📷 Cottage Point has poor reception. Photo: Adam Ward

Marine Rescue has to radio into a home base and have the home base call paramedics in emergencies.

Last year Mr Millar was on the water when INXS guitarist Tim Farriss severed his left ring finger nearby. He said Farriss had no phone reception and was lucky his boat picked up a faint signal on the radio.

“We received a call saying ‘help, help, help, is there anyone out there’,” he said.

“It was two guys on a boat they were struggling to get an anchor up. Unfortunately his (Farriss’) fingers went through the wench that pulled the top of the chain up and removed a finger.”



 INXS guitarist Tim Farriss (right) with a hand brace shortly after the incident. Picture: Christian Gilles

He said they had to radio their base, and take Farriss to nearby Akuna Bay where an ambulance could pick him up.

“We dispatched a couple of guys down at the front of Akuna Bay so that when the ambulance arrived they could at least say ‘hi guys come with us’,” he said.

“If we had the ability to use mobile phones we would have been able to speak to them directly. Luckily that wasn’t life-threatening.”

Trent and Angela Wilson have owned the Cottage Point Kiosk for two years — they acknowledge part of the area’s appeal is its off-the-grid nature, but fear an emergency could be disastrous.



📷 Angela Wilson, owner of the Cottage Point Kiosk. Picture: Adam Ward.

The pair have struggled to undertake simple administrative tasks and pay bills without a reliable internet.

“We get a maximum 1.5 megabytes, that is our download speed. We have actually been told by Telstra they are testing us at eight megabytes per second so they can’t even test at a level that our system can receive,” Mrs Wilson said.

She said their marketing is almost non-existent.

“We don’t have much of a social media profile, even just to post a nice photo of the restaurant on Facebook takes forever,” she said.

Mrs Wilson saves their photos and drives out to Mona Vale to post them.

“There is nothing instant about Instagram here,” she said. “There is nothing instant about

standing on top of a table and hoping for reception.”



 Cottage Point Kiosk’s owners say internet problems mean their marketing is ‘non-existent’. Picture: Adam Ward

Mr Wilson highlighted other safety issues, particularly that they hire out boats and if there was an accident the boat occupants would not be able to call for help.

He said they have radios installed on the boats, but they were unreliable.

He said their internet has regular outages, and there was no solution present.

“We had an outage one night due to the rain. When I finally got through to a manager in the Philippines he tested our line and said ‘we have higher speed internet in the Philippines than you have in Cottage Point’,” Mr Wilson said.



📷 Homes on the hill at Cottage Point. Photo: Adam Ward

The prestigious Cottage Point Inn is among Australia's top restaurants — a feat that is impressive given the rise of social media and its inability to take part due to poor internet connectivity.

Owner Shane Olesen welcomes the rich and famous to his venue, most of whom arrive by sea plane or yacht.

But he said a growing expectancy of mobile phone reception and internet connectivity left him embarrassed when guests could not post a selfie or get online.

“You have got people wanting to put things on Instagram or tweet,” he said.

“It is a big thing in restaurants, people will take a photo of their meal then Instagram it.

“People don't do that when they go home, they do it in the moment. That is a service I

can't provide down here to people.”



📷 Owner of the Cottage Point Inn, Shane Oleson. Photo: Adam Ward

He expressed frustration that he struggled to pay bills on time due to internet struggles, and that he could not implement an online booking system.

Mr Falinski took a tour of Cottage Point last week.

He said he had been in touch with phone providers and encouraged them to put forward an argument for government assistance under black spot funding.

He has spoken with Communications Minister Mitch Fifield and has campaigned on the Parliament floor vowing to “fight for the basic right” of reliable coverage.

“Mitch has more than promised to look at it, he is going to actively pursue the matter, we are doing everything we can,” Mr Falinski said.



📷 Communications Minister Mitch Fifield at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture Kym Smith.

He said the top of Cottage Point, near the Rural Fire Service base, was an ideal location for a phone tower.

“It is a unique part of Sydney. They pay a lot of tax. They don’t have water, they don’t have sewerage. The one thing they should be able to get, frankly, is reliable broadband and telephone services,” Mr Falinski said,

“It is not good enough in the 21st century.”

The Communications Department said that in the previous round of black spot funding, none of the telcos applied in the area.

“All Australians in potentially risky situations are encouraged to carry alternate forms of communication, such as two-way radio, as they have been since before mobile phones became available,” a spokesman said.

He said Telstra maps showed 3G was available in Cottage Point.

A spokesman for Regional Communications Minister Fiona Nash said the Government could not force telecommunications companies to build phone towers.

“It offers a subsidy to encourage them to do so,” he said.



 Businesses are struggling with slow internet. Picture: Supplied.

COTTAGE POINT:

- Home to 54 families — with 84 adults
- The town includes a kiosk, yacht club, world-class restaurant, Rural Fire Service and Marine Rescue
- Residents have campaigned for better service since 2004

- About 50,000 tourists visit the area every year
- Pays \$3 million in taxes per year