

news release



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## **“Continuous coverage” road trip starts its 9,500 km journey on the Sapphire Coast of NSW**

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Merimbula, 17 October: The \$25 million Federal Government initiative to improve mobile phone network coverage along many of the nation's highways took a further step forward with a ground-breaking ceremony for the first of the 141 Vodafone mobile phone towers that will deliver the additional coverage.

Communications Minister, Senator Richard Alston, performed the ceremony just outside Merimbula, on New South Wales' Sapphire Coast, accompanied by Liberal MP Gary Nairn, local dignitaries and Vodafone senior management.

The ceremony marked the start of a “continuous coverage” road trip that will begin 470 km south of Sydney, but which will cover another 9,000 km on eight major highways before it reaches journey's end in June 2002.

Vodafone, which has already invested \$2.7 billion in mobile services since its arrival in Australia in 1993, was selected as the preferred tenderer to extend the existing global system for mobiles (GSM) digital network along major rural and regional highways.

The ‘Mobile Phones on Highways’ project will ensure better coverage for travellers and members of the communities that line the designated highway network. These roads currently carry more than one million vehicles each day. As part of its tender Vodafone offered inter-carrier roaming which ensures that not only Vodafone customers will benefit, but that all GSM users can potentially enjoy improved mobile coverage.

The Merimbula site is 200 metres from the dumping area of the Bega Valley Shire council rubbish tip near Tura Beach, and almost half a kilometre from the nearest residence. In an unobtrusive location that utilises unpopulated wasteland and is surrounded by trees, the 50 metre high mobile phone tower is expected to have minimum visual impact once built.

It was chosen following consultation with the local community and local planning authorities.

According to Vodafone Pacific's General Manager Regulatory, Peter Stiffe, the ceremony at Merimbula will lead to the start of substantial new coverage in the area, including:

- Princes Highway;
- Merimbula town - which has previously had only patchy coverage provided by 'spillover' from other sites; and
- Tura Beach – popular with tourists, particularly 'weekending' Canberra residents.

"The construction of the rural highways project will further increase competition in the mobile telephony market," said Mr Stiffe. "GSM mobile technology is the overwhelming choice for Australians. More than 95 per cent of the 11 million mobile users in this country are using GSM."

The 9,500 km route map for the project includes:

- Port Douglas to Adelaide via Highway One (Cairns, Brisbane, Sydney, Eden, Melbourne, Mt Gambier and Murray Bridge)
- Melbourne to Brisbane via Hume, Newell and Cunningham Highways
- Melbourne to Adelaide via Western, Dukes Highways
- Sydney to Brisbane via F3 and New England Highways
- Sydney to Adelaide via Hume and Sturt Highways
- Sydney to Melbourne via Hume and Sturt Highways
- Hobart to Burnie via Midland and Bass Highways
- Canberra to Goulburn/Yass via the Federal and Barton Highways

### **About Vodafone**

Vodafone Group Plc is the world's largest mobile telecommunications company with more than 95.6 million proportionate customers. The company provides quality services to 2.09 million Australian customers, 1.08 million New Zealand customers and 73,000 Fijian customers. It has interests in mobile telephone networks in 28 countries over five continents.

Note: Vodafone is a trademark spelt with an 'f' and not a 'ph'.

For more information, please contact:

[www.vodafone.com.au](http://www.vodafone.com.au)

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