

Roy Garner

17 April 2002

Re: Electricity Undergrounding

**Submission to:
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal inquiry on
Electricity Undergrounding in New South Wales**

Services infrastructure provision – a right or a privilege? (*or* Opting out avoids the issue)

The recent Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal interim report to the NSW Minister for Energy, "Electricity Undergrounding in New South Wales" recommends, inter alia, "that local communities that place a relatively low value on amenity benefits such as views be able to opt out of the [undergrounding] program."

One wonders which "local communities" the tribunal has in mind, and how their collective will is to be ascertained.

Such a position only makes sense within the user-pays paradigm, where, it is implied, poorer communities may not wish to pay for infrastructural costs. This position also suggests a prejudice against poorer communities – that they do not care for their visual amenity.

To pursue such a position is to entrench discrimination against the disadvantaged, and should be rejected by all progressive decision-makers.

Moreover, it avoids confronting service providers with their responsibility for the whole community, and to ensure that their infrastructure meets the highest reliability, safety and aesthetic standards, and that they bear all of the cost as a community service.

Where privatised service providers' profits are concerned, the interests of the community should not be subverted by the interests of shareholders.

Even were the Government to accept the Tribunal's outrageous proposition to allow local communities to opt out of undergrounding, insurers might rightly object to the public liability exposure inherent in this "democratic" prejudice.

Roy Garner

CC Hon Kim Yeadon, NSW Minister for Energy