

Vale Doug Campbell (1939–2023)

A Tribute to a Quiet Achiever and his Contributions to Australian Telecommunications

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Abstract: Doug Campbell commenced his life and career in Canada. He joined the Australian telecommunications sector in mid-career and made extended contributions in many different senior management positions in Telecom Australia and Telstra, particularly in modernising the Telstra network, in establishing and managing Telstra Country Wide, and, then, in the early phase of the national broadband network, in NBN Co. Doug died on 2 December 2023, and is sadly missed by his family, friends and former colleagues. This tribute, to which many have contributed, seeks to set Doug's life and career in the context of the times. He was at the table, often as the key decision-maker, during many of the significant changes in the telecommunications industry during the last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st.

Keywords: Doug Campbell, Obituaries, Australian telecommunications, Telstra, National Broadband Network

Introduction

Doug Campbell contributed substantially to Australian telecommunications, but started his life and career in a different country, in a different industry, and with different professional training. Being a civil engineer in the telecommunications subsidiary of a major railway company in Canada is an abnormal starting place for his subsequent career in the telecommunications sector in Australia, but, as I hope to explain in this tribute, the connective possibilities played out in Doug's life and career.

Early Life

Douglas Cameron Campbell AM was born on 4 May 1939 in Maxville, Ontario, Canada, a town of Scottish settlers between Ottawa and Montreal. The Campbell family owned the general

store, which also doubled as the town's mortuary. During the second world war, Doug's father, Cameron Campbell, trained as a radio operator and served in the Canadian Air Force, stationed in the United Kingdom. On his return, he joined Air Canada, and the family moved to Montreal, where Doug spent his formative years ([J. Campbell, 2024](#)).

Doug completed a Civil Engineering degree at McGill University, Montreal in 1961 ([D. Campbell, 1965](#)).

Canadian National Telecommunications

As an undergraduate, from 1957 to 1960, he worked during the summers with Canadian National Telecommunications, part of the government-owned Canadian National organisation. Canadian National Telecommunications was at that time extending its telecommunications infrastructure across Canada. Doug's vacation job was to assist in the inspection of all civil works connected with the construction of the microwave network in northern Quebec, Newfoundland and the Yukon Territories ([D. Campbell, 1965](#)).

On graduating, Doug joined Canadian National Telecommunications full time. A lot of his early work was as a Project Engineer. During the 1960s and 1970s, he rose through the ranks of the organisation to become the President of what had by then become CN Communications (CNC). He was President of CNC from 1982 to 1988, reporting to the Group Vice President of CN Enterprises. In that role, Doug was responsible for the total strategy and operations of CNC, including being chairman or president of a number of CNC subsidiaries ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)). But in 1988 he left Canada to migrate to Australia.

Australia

Joy, Doug's widow, is Australian and, in the early 1960s, she was employed in Canadian National's Sydney office. When she advised the company that she intended to leave and to travel the world, her manager suggested that she might take up a job with the organisation in Canada. She accepted a secretarial position in Jasper Park Lodge, Alberta, in 1963. It was there that she met Doug, who was a Project Engineer for CNC, supervising the construction of cable cars and towers in the Rockies. One of the sites was near Jasper. In 1965, Joy and Doug were married in Mosman, Sydney. Doug promised Joy and her family that they would settle at some point in Australia. That occurred 25 years later, after their two daughters, Joanne and Wendy, had grown up, and at an appropriate time in Doug's working life ([J. Campbell, 2024](#)). The timing was reinforced by the sale by Canadian National in 1988 of its remaining interest in the telecommunications network business to Rogers Communications ([Romain, 1988](#)). It was subsequently renamed as Unitel Communications Incorporated (["CNCP Telecommunications changes name to Unitel", 1990](#)).

Doug became an Australian citizen on Australia Day, 1991.

AWA Limited

Doug joined AWA in Sydney in November 1988 as General Manager, Business Operations Defence and Aerospace, in the Defence & Aerospace Division. As Doug noted: “This role was responsible for the coordination of manufacturing and marketing of the Defence and Aerospace Sector product groups. This role included maintaining a constructive operating environment at a time when the division was exposed to a very difficult competitive situation, in addition to going through a complex and challenging stage of its redevelopment” ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

However, as Doug also noted: “Shortly after starting this role, I was approached by Search Consultants to consider the position of Deputy Managing Director for Telecom” ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

Telecom Australia

During the 1980s it became increasingly clear to industry participants and to the Government that the structural arrangements for the telecommunications sector needed to be changed to allow greater competition to meet greater and more diverse customer demand. From the establishment of Telecom in 1975, the monopoly domestic position of the organisation was a source of major and growing contention. Telecom was under-capitalised and increasingly unable to satisfy the demands upon it by customers, especially business and corporate customers with more complex requirements than Telecom was organised to deliver. Its cost base and price levels were also a source of criticism. The Davidson Inquiry, which reported to the Government in 1982, reflected the growing concerns of many diverse groups of customers ([Minister for Communications, 1983](#)). Telecom was able to avoid the level of competition proposed by Davidson at that time, but it did commence the process of organising itself to better serve its customers and to prepare for competition across the board. The Government in 1989 tasked the Department of Transport and Communications to lead the Review of Structural Arrangements (ROSA), in anticipation of introducing network competition.

In response to ROSA, the Telecom Board resolved to dramatically improve the commercial capabilities of the organisation, especially with the recruitment of senior managers from the private sector experienced in competitive markets in Australia and overseas. Search consultants were appointed and they recommended that the Board consider Doug Campbell as Deputy Managing Director.

Doug commenced with Telecom in June 1989 as the Deputy Managing Director reporting to the Managing Director, Mel Ward. The job ahead of him was massive. It included “developing

the marketing culture and an effective marketing and sales capability in all customer divisions” ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)), as well as reducing costs across the organisation, introducing a new flexible billing system, and managing and controlling the growth of Information Technology (IT) standalone projects. Doug was responsible for the profitability for all major operating divisions.

To make the challenge greater for Doug, the entrenched culture of Telecom was to find and develop management talent internally, and tended to be resistant to radical or externally-sourced change.¹ This culture reached to the highest levels in the organisation. Doug was an outsider, and proposed to bring more outsiders onto the payroll. Reducing the cost base inevitably meant that staffing in excess of current and future needs had to be addressed. To make matters worse, the then Managing Director, Mel Ward, was not involved in his own Deputy’s selection – not a good start.²

The first introduction most managers and staff had to Doug was when he addressed a meeting of around 1,000 staff (in person and on video links to all states) in June 1989 at the Sir Dallas Brooks Hall in Albert Street, Melbourne. He was introduced by the Managing Director, Mel Ward, and spoke for around 10 minutes. Doug touched on his background and the need for Telecom to be more market-oriented, competitive and efficient. He then answered questions for a lot longer than that.

Doug considered that it was part of his job to find the best people to perform critical roles and that many were already in the organisation ([Bamber, 2023](#)), but not all. In 1990, he recruited two former Bell System managers: Mike Makieve, as General Manager, Country Division; and David Oertle, as Chief Information Officer. These appointments were about improved service and cost management. Organisation units that would face direct competition – initially in the cities – were entrusted to internal appointees whose capabilities had been rated highly.

At this time, and later, Doug’s qualities as an experienced and capable senior manager and leader stood out. A typical assessment of those who worked directly for Doug reads: “Campbell proved to be one of [few] bosses in my career whom I respected as a professional manager. He was a good choice for Telecom” ([I. Campbell, 2024](#)).

Ian Campbell (no relation) commented that Doug delivered early on his mission to reduce costs and otherwise prepare Telstra to be an effective competitor in the era ahead. “Within six months Doug had found over \$750 million³ in savings in Telecom’s landline network operations. ... he had convinced the people who caused those costs to adopt a plan to save them” ([I. Campbell, 2023](#)).

Telstra

The ROSA review, referred to above, ultimately resulted in the merger of Telecom Australia and the Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, and the licensing of another general carrier (Optus) and of another mobile network operator (Vodafone). In early 1992 the former Telecom and OTC corporations were merged into the Australian and Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, trading early in its life as Telstra and then formally becoming Telstra Corporation in 1995. The merging of two separate organisations, with different roles and cultures into a single effective enterprise, was no mean feat. Internal competition for positions was a source of ongoing friction, as was the Board's expectation that senior positions would be filled in equal measure by ex-Telecom and ex-OTC personnel. External appointments were also made to some positions.

The Board appointed Frank Blount, a former AT&T and Bell System executive, as Chief Executive Officer commencing at the start of 1992. Doug had a new boss, and one who was well experienced in the imperatives of a competitive telecommunications marketplace.

From July 1992 to March 1993, Doug was the Group General Manager – Commercial & Consumer Group, with responsibility for 8 million small business and residential customers, 30,000 staff and \$4B in sales ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

Over the 14 years of Doug's career, the organisational structure of Telstra went through many transformations, and the key responsibilities that Doug took on changed as well. The senior management personnel of the organisation were turned over. Almost all of the first line reports from Telecom were gone by the end of 1994, as well as some who had joined since then ([I. Campbell, 2024](#)).

From 1993 to 1997, Doug was the Group Managing Director, Network & Technology Group, reporting to the CEO, and his responsibilities extended to network product planning, design and construction. In former times this was the technical and engineering expertise core of the organisation. Doug's challenge was to ensure that it fully supported customer operations as a key factor for competitive success. An important part of his success was to set the groundwork for developing, upgrading and modernising the entire Australian communications network, through a program known as the Future Mode of Operation (FMO). Doug took over the strategy and plan for the FMO in 1993, and his achievement was to ensure that it was realised. This was a massive task ([I. Campbell, 2017](#)).

Doug also had responsibility for renegotiation of the outdated union agreements related to the operation and maintenance of the network. The agreements at the time were inappropriate for the new modernised network being built and the emerging competitive environment.

The new digital network resulting from FMO and the new staffing agreements allowed Telstra to reduce the number of operational locations from approximately 200 across Australia to one single Global Operating Centre. Telstra was the first national telecommunications company in the world to achieve this major step in operating efficiency ([Moriarty, 2024](#)). These key initiatives were led by Gerry Moriarty AM, whom Doug recruited as Managing Director, Network & Technology Group, in 1993.

In parallel, Doug was responsible for major IT developments in Telstra's Operational Support Systems and Business Support Systems capabilities necessary to support the digital network's ability to provide multiple new products.

In 1998 Doug was appointed as Group Managing Director, Carrier Services Business, reporting to the CEO. Effectively, this was Telstra's wholesale arm, responsible for dealing with Telstra's competitors who required access to Telstra's network capacity, including interconnection services, in order to complete their own market offerings. Apart from negotiating with competitors, Doug and his team had responsibility for dealing with the regulator, then called the Australian Communications Authority (ACA, now ACMA) for suitable interconnect conditions and termination rates for the use of Telstra's network. Doug noted that "this area had fallen into major dispute with its customers and both legal cases and political angst had risen to unacceptable levels. I was asked by Frank Blount to take over this group and bring the whole environment into a more acceptable commercial arrangement. ... There was a general recognition of a major turnaround in the industry relations after 18 months" ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

The Service Providers Industry Association (known as SPAN),⁴ which included most of the network competitors in the industry and all of Doug's wholesale customers, recognised Doug's contribution with an award at its annual dinner in 2003 ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

Ziggy Switkowski was appointed as CEO of Telstra in March 1999, and asked Doug to take on the role of Group Managing Director, Wholesale and International Business Unit, reporting to the CEO. This involved adding the international portfolio to the Carrier Services Group. International investments ranged from smaller investments in business operations in Asia, Europe and the United States, to a large contract and investment in an earth station in Vietnam. It needed Doug's calm and measured approach to sort through these and advise the Board and CEO on how this area might be managed into the future.

Doug has been described by many as a "straight shooter" and as somebody who hated organisational politics. "The management atmosphere in Telstra was highly political. In this difficult situation Doug maintained his lifetime custom: professional management; candid and

open communications; abhorrence of politics; loyalty to the firm, his colleagues and the task; and complete integrity” ([I. Campbell, 2023](#)).

It should not be assumed that Doug was oblivious to the politics of the organisation in which he worked. Far from it. One commentator has said: “He was generally calm and measured ... and shrewd and good at reading difficult situations. He knew when to keep quiet and when to press his case” ([Lockwood, 2024](#)). However, he avoided adding oxygen or stoking the fire and, essentially, got on with the job of encouraging his teams to deliver substantive outcomes.

Telstra Country Wide



Figure 1. Doug Campbell as Group Managing Director, Telstra Country Wide

In coming to office in 1996, the Coalition Government under John Howard quickly moved ahead with its commitment to privatise Telstra. “After it won that election, the Howard Government moved almost immediately to sell one-third of Telstra, introducing legislation—the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill 1996—for the sale in May of 1996. The sale Bill passed the Senate in December that year” ([Department of Parliamentary Library, 2003](#)). The first tranche involved the sale of one-third of Telstra, and was generally regarded as very successful ([Department of Parliamentary Library, 2003](#)).

However, the Coalition was not uniformly in favour of privatisation. National Party and Liberal members representing rural and regional electorates were concerned, and sought firm commitments that their constituents would not be disadvantaged.

“Following what was considered a highly successful first tranche float, the Howard Government moved quickly to introduce legislation—the Telstra (Transition to Full Private Ownership) Bill 1998— to fully privatise Telstra. However, early attempts to get support for a full sale failed when independent Senators Brian Harradine and Mal Colston did not support the Bill. The Howard Government had to settle for selling off a further 16 per cent, enabling it to privatise almost half of Telstra with the Government maintaining a majority shareholding (50.1 per cent). The second tranche sale was also subject to a funding package to improve telecommunications services—the social bonus initiatives” ([Department of Parliamentary Library, 2003](#), p. 1).

The Government was precluded by the terms of the second tranche sale legislation from selling further equity tranches in Telstra below 50.1% unless an independent inquiry certified that Telstra had met various operational performance criteria.

The independent inquiry that followed, “known subsequently as the Telecommunications Service (or Besley) Inquiry (TSI), found that some problems existed in rural and regional areas with regard to: the timeliness of installation, repair and reliability of basic telephone services; mobile phone coverage and pricing; and reliable access to the internet” ([Department of Parliamentary Library, 2003](#)).

This was the context in which the formation of Telstra Country Wide (TCW) arose. The Government was anxious that Telstra should address the issues raised in the Besley report, so that further sales of equity could go ahead.

According to many commentators, Doug’s most outstanding achievement, amongst his many achievements in Telstra, was the creation and operation of Telstra Country Wide (TCW). In 2000, Doug took a proposal to the Telstra Board to create TCW as a separate unit to concentrate on delivering better service to Telstra’s three million customers in rural and regional Australia. The Board accepted his recommendation and he was appointed as the inaugural Group Managing Director, reporting to the Chief Executive Officer.

In this role, Doug excelled. The role played to his strengths. It was operational and involved achieving tangible results. Compared to many Head Office roles, it was less occupied with the politics within a large organisation.

Initially, TCW focussed on the second tier of regional towns and cities, and on smaller communities and rural locations. As Roger Bamber put it: “Its initial focus was not on the Newcastles of Australia but on the next tier down, the Maitlands, Geraldtons, Cairns, etc. across Australia” ([Bamber, 2023](#)).

The initiative was widely seen as successful, particularly in delivering service and service restoration, and in engaging with customers. The response of customers and local community groups, and of regional politicians, affirmed this. The results were in no small measure because of Doug himself and his management style. Roger Bamber, who worked very closely with Doug during this period as one of Doug’s key reports, notes:

“Doug saw the problems He picked people with the potential to grow and by his management style, he let them manage. Meanwhile he kept the rest of the company and board onside. The Area General Managers were accountable and they drove the business. The Area General Managers and their teams produced the goods right across Australia due to Doug’s vision and leadership.

“After a couple of years, the Members of Parliament representing the Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Canberra, Outer Melbourne, etc. were all agitating for the same treatment that their smaller rural cousins were getting. Accordingly, Telstra Country Wide Mark 2 was formed taking in all the regional cities, Canberra, and outer metro Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne” ([Bamber, 2023](#)).

The Government announced a further inquiry into regional telecommunications services in August 2002. This was the Regional Telecommunications (or Estens) Inquiry, (RTI). “The RTI was also required to evaluate the Government’s response to the recommendations of the TSI and to suggest ways to future proof regional telecommunications service standards. The inquiry gave general support to the Government’s TSI initiatives, suggested that telecommunications service standards were generally adequate and provided recommendations on ensuring the future standard of telecommunications services” ([Department of Parliamentary Library, 2003](#)).

The improvement in Telstra’s performance, particularly in providing service to regional and rural Australia, was clearly being recognised. Doug played a critical role as head of TCW. His responsibilities were extended in August 2002 when, in addition to TCW, he took over accountability for Telstra’s Networks & Technology Group, for a period, on the resignation of Gerry Moriarty ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)).

Industry recognition and awards

There was widespread recognition of Doug’s contribution to the industry during his period in TCW. In March 2003, he was awarded the Australian Telecommunications Users Group’s highest individual honour, the Charles Todd Medal,⁵ for outstanding service to the telecommunications industry. “This award recognised my major contribution to the development of the wholesale market and for improving services to regional, rural and remote Australia” ([D. Campbell, 2005](#)). In May 2003, he was recognised by the Customer Service Institute of Australia as the Customer Service “CEO of the Year”, and TCW was separately awarded the Australian Service Excellence Award for outstanding excellence in customer service.

Doug was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2006 Australia Day honours “for service to business and to the community, particularly as a contributor to the development of communications services in regional and remote areas of Australia” ([Commonwealth of Australia, 2006](#)).

Sol Trujillo, an American telecommunications executive, was appointed as Chief Executive of Telstra in July 2005, following the resignation of Ziggy Switkowski in December 2004.

Another change at the top was followed by another round of organisational and personnel changes. Doug worked out his contract under the new management and retired from Telstra in January 2006.⁶ However, Doug was not seeking to retire completely.

National Broadband Network and retirement

Doug was actively interested in the early stages of the national broadband network and the subsequent establishment of the National Broadband Network Company (NBN Co) by the newly-elected Labor Government, after the Government decided not to accept any of the proposals from Telstra and others to build the network. The Tasmanian State Government was very keen that Tasmania take a leading role in broadband, and a separate company was established as a subsidiary of NBN Co to use the State power company, Aurora Energy, to roll out a fibre network on a pilot basis.⁷ Doug was appointed to the NBN Co board in 2009 and was heavily focussed on the Tasmanian rollout.

However, NBN Co board duties did not engage Doug in the same way as the heady days of running TCW. He resigned from his directorship in 2010 and retired. Mike Quigley, the inaugural NBN Co CEO from 2009 to 2013, noted that Doug made an important contribution to the early architecture and initial work of NBN Co.⁸ At this stage, Doug was 71. He had had a substantial career in Canada, and a further substantial career in Australia.

Doug and Joy had moved to Sydney much earlier and Doug enjoyed his retirement there. Ill health dogged his later years and he was in care for several years before his death, aged 84, on 2 December 2023. He is survived by Joy and his daughters, Wendy and Joanne, and their families.

Doug made an indelible mark on Australian telecommunications at a critical stage in its development. We in the industry are indeed thankful that he came here.

The views of many who knew and worked with Doug are captured in the following words of a long-serving Telecom and Telstra senior manager:

“I believe Doug’s greatest contribution was in providing leadership, dignity, and stability in the evolution of Telecom to Telstra—this was a herculean task of managing a new, competitive, and merged environment with the added challenge of privatisation—Doug’s calm and measured approach, his honest dealings with the Board, management, staff, and all stakeholders allowed the company to both survive and thrive. Doug always played the ball and not the man and was universally admired and respected for his approach in internal and external dealings. One could always rely on Doug as he managed the duality of fundamental change but the necessary corporate stability to achieve it” (Ward, 2024).

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End Notes

¹ This is the view of the author, and, undoubtedly, of many others within and outside Telecom at that time.

² The reason given to the author by the Chairman of the Board, Alex Morokoff, at that time was that Mel Ward was still in negotiations with the Board to finalise his own employment contract and therefore could not be involved.

³ Equating to around \$1.9 billion in 2024 values.

⁴ SPAN merged with the Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) in 2006. ACIF subsequently became the Communications Alliance ([“Comms bodies SPAN and ACIF merge”, 2006](#)).

⁵ The Charles Todd Medal has been taken over by TelSoc, from 2013, and is now awarded on an occasional, rather than annual, basis by TelSoc. The medallists since the inception of the award in 1992 are listed on the TelSoc website: <https://telsoc.org/history/industry-awards>.

⁶ In the absence of documentation available to the author, this date is the author’s best estimate of Doug’s retirement date after talking to his former colleagues of around that time.

⁷ The history of the request for tenders by the newly elected Rudd Labor Government is summarised in an article, History of the National Broadband Network, which contains further specific references. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_National_Broadband_Network

⁸ Mike Quigley, in discussion with the author, 24 April 2024.