



20th December 2019

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Legislation
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Re: Telecommunications legislative reform package

ACCAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee's inquiry into the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill and the Telecommunications (Regional Broadband Scheme) Charge Bill.

ACCAN believes that the reform package should be passed with the utmost priority.

The introduction of the statutory infrastructure provider obligations set out in the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill is particularly important and underpins guaranteed access to the National Broadband Network, and other networks where relevant, beyond the end of the rollout period. Implementing this critical reform is essential to ensuring that all Australians have access to broadband services, irrespective of where they live. The Bill also provides for the Minister to determine service performance standards for NBN and other networks which are an important element for accountability and service delivery suited to the needs of consumers and businesses across the country.

ACCAN appreciates the need for ongoing funding of regional, rural and remote telecommunications services is enduring, and we support the establishment of funding mechanisms that are commensurate with this need. Accordingly, ACCAN is supportive of the development of long-term and sustainable mechanisms that provide an ongoing revenue base to support non-commercial regional NBN services.

The funding of regional, rural and remote communications services should be undertaken on an equitable basis and contributions should be made from across industry, as has historically been the case. ACCAN does not believe that network operators should be able to avoid contributing to the provision of non-commercial regional services and that efforts should be made to ensure that no industry participants can shirk their obligations to the community.

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Australia's peak body representing communications consumers

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That said, we should learn from the weaknesses in legacy Universal Service Obligation arrangements that cross subsidise Telstra's delivery of fixed voice services and payphones, and incorporate transparent accountability by NBN as to how funds raised via the Regional Broadband Scheme are expended on regional communications. This includes accountability of service performance - prompt connection and fault repair times, and service reliability measures to minimise drop outs and service interruptions. The powers given to the Minister under the CCA Amendment Bill complement the Regional Broadband Bill, and provide the mechanism for this outcome.

ACCAN believes that there are a myriad of communications policy issues that merit further consideration by the Committee into the future. These include significant affordability and service standards challenges faced by consumers, whether they are on NBN or non-NBN wholesale networks. However, ACCAN notes that these issues are not the focus of the current consultation and will continue to raise these issues in the appropriate forums.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Corbin
Chief Executive Officer