



17 January 2020

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill 2019 and Telecommunications (Regional Broadband Scheme) Charge Bill 2019

The Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill and the Telecommunications (Regional Broadband Scheme) Charge Bill (the Telecommunications Reform Package). The RRRCC believes that the Telecommunications Reform Package, which was first introduced to Parliament in 2017, should be passed as a matter of priority.

The RRRCC is an alliance of 21 volunteer and advocacy organisations with a shared interest in improving telecommunications in the bush. The Coalition was formed in 2016 to raise awareness of the important role of connectivity for regional, rural and remote Australians and to advocate for continued improvements. The RRRCC's advocacy efforts are focused on five high level goals, under which we have articulated a number of specific asks. The RRRCC's five goals are:

1. Guaranteed access to voice and data services.
2. Equitable voice and data services that meet minimum standards and reliability.
3. Continued program to expand mobile coverage.
4. Digital capacity building for regional, rural and remote Australia.
5. Affordable communications services for regional, rural and remote Australia.

Passage of the Telecommunications Reform Package is a priority ask under the RRRCC's first goal (Guaranteed access to voice and data services), and the RRRCC



welcomed the re-introduction of this legislation to the House of Representatives on 28 November 2019. All Australians – including regional, rural and remote consumers and businesses – need legislated rights to access broadband data and voice services, which is why the RRRCC has called for the Telecommunications Reform Package to be prioritised by the Federal Government, and passed with bipartisan support.

The introduction of the statutory infrastructure provider obligations set out in the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer) Bill are particularly important and underpin guaranteed access to the National Broadband Network 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.

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

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 Competition and Consumer Amendment Bill complement the Regional Broadband Bill, and provide the mechanism for this outcome.

The RRRCC 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, the RRRCC notes that these issues are not the focus of the current consultation and will continue to raise these issues in the appropriate forums.

Since the Telecommunications Reform Package legislation was first introduced to Parliament in June 2017 the measures have been subject to scrutiny including



through parliamentary debate and a previous Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry. The Bills incorporate a number of amendments moved by the Government and the Opposition when the Bills were previously before the Parliament. The RRRCC believe that the legislation has been thoroughly considered through these processes and adapted to a form appropriate for passage. The RRRCC supports the Bills being passed, as a single package, as a matter of priority in the 2020 Parliamentary year.

Should you require any further information in relation to this submission, please contact Adrienne Ryan, General Manager Rural Affairs at the National Farmers' Federation,

Yours sincerely,

The Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition

