

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Government should publicly confirm its acknowledgement that the existing copper fixed line network is becoming increasingly obsolete. Government policy should focus on the objective of having this network replaced with a fixed line network based on fibre to the home technology, or alternative technologies offering similar capacity, over the next decade (para. 7.15).

Recommendation 2

In recognition of the importance of data services to all Australians the Government should require Telstra to remove from its network as soon as practicable all pair gain systems which do not support broadband services or which restrict dial-up connection speeds (para. 7.25).

Recommendation 3

While acknowledging the interim nature of dial-up Internet services, the Committee recommends that the Government should place a licence condition on all carriers providing voice telephony services requiring that their networks support a minimum speed for dial up services. That speed should be progressively increased over the next two years to at least 40 kbps (para. 7.26).

Recommendation 4

Consumers should have a legislated right to access, on demand, to information about whether their services are provided via a pair gain system, and about the full range of services which can be supported to their address (para. 7.27).

Recommendation 5

The Government should place a licence condition on the Universal Service Provider specifying that a broadband service providing a minimum data connection speed be made available to all Australians within twelve months (para. 7.28).

Recommendation 6

The dial up and broadband speeds specified above should be reviewed and updated every 12 months to ensure that they remain contemporary to the needs of users. The specified speeds should be based on the capacity of telecommunications networks operating at international best practice standards, not on current services offered by Telstra or by other carriers, or the existing capabilities of the Telstra network (para. 7.29).

Recommendation 7

The Universal Service Obligation should be revised to incorporate a guarantee that customers will always be able to obtain a dial tone (para. 7.38).

Recommendation 8

The Universal Service Obligation should be revised to incorporate a guarantee that dial-up Internet connections will not drop out (para. 7.39).

Recommendation 9

The Government should require the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) to conduct an independent inquiry into the state of repair of Telstra's customer access network and the Government should, if necessary, use its powers to direct Telstra to bring the network up to an acceptable operational standard. As a part of the inquiry the ACA should examine technical standards and regulations, including those relating to preventing the ingress of water into CAN cables, and amend those standards and regulations so as to protect the physical integrity and ensure adequate maintenance of the customer access network (para. 7.40).

Recommendation 10

The role and powers of the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) should be urgently reviewed and enhanced so that it can effectively and proactively regulate the Australian telecommunications network. In particular the ACA should have the power to investigate the condition of the Universal Service Provider's network and require the Universal Service Provider to make improvements to its network where the expenditure can be justified in the public interest. The Government should respond promptly to the recommendations of the Department's Universal Service Obligation and Customer Service Guarantee Review (para. 7.41).

Recommendation 11

The Government should immediately review the operation of the customer service guarantee regime to ensure that it provides a high level of protection for consumers and that mass service disruption notices cannot be used by carriers to avoid their obligations to properly maintain their networks and provide an acceptable standard of service to consumers (para. 7.42).

Recommendation 12

The Government should direct the Australian Communications Authority to regularly monitor the level of faults on data services (para. 7.43).

Recommendation 13

The Committee commends the findings of the Payphone Policy Review as it relates to services for the disabled for close examination by the Government (para. 7.48).

Recommendation 14

The Government should fund the establishment of an independent disabilities equipment program using funding from the Universal Service Levy (para. 7.49).

Recommendation 15

The Government should require carriers to engage in extensive consultations with representatives of people with disabilities at an early stage in the planning process for the introduction of new telecommunications technology to ensure that appropriate disability equipment will be available in conjunction with the introduction of new technology (para. 7.50).

Recommendation 16

The ACA should be empowered and required to develop a comprehensive inventory of all significant telecommunications infrastructure, including geospatial data on Telstra's existing customer access network and mobile phone coverage, and make that information available to other carriers and service providers, local government, and other interested parties to facilitate planning for new infrastructure (para. 7.55).

Recommendation 17

Future Government programs aimed at enhancing telecommunications services should be designed to prevent Telstra from using those programs to maintain or strengthen its dominance of the telecommunications market. Where necessary this may involve restricting Telstra's participation in some aspects of those programs (para. 7.56).

Recommendation 18

In contracting for telecommunications services, government agencies and departments should be directed to design tender processes which facilitate participation by small and medium carriers, and to take into account the policy objective of developing a more competitive telecommunications industry in assessing tenders (para. 7.57).

Recommendation 19

In contracting for telecommunications services in rural and regional areas where there is limited infrastructure competition, government agencies and departments should be directed to participate where possible in demand aggregation arrangements with the objective of improving the incentives for the development of competitive infrastructure (para. 7.58).