

29 February 2024

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
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SUBMISSION: Better Delivery of Universal Services – Reform required.

The South Australian Forest Products Association (SAFPA) is pleased to provide a response to the Commonwealth Government and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' review of the current universal service arrangements.

SAFPA is a member-based organisation with majority of our membership living and working in regional and rural communities in South Australia. Telecommunications has been, and continues to be, a challenge within the forest industries with many stakeholders advocating for better and stronger teleservices. SAFPA is pleased to be a partner in a Regional Connectivity Program with the South Australian Government, six local councils and Telstra which aims to resolve many of these issues.

There is no question that reliable and modern technology has the ability to improve the livelihoods, social wellbeing and public safety of those living, working and travelling through the regions, as many residents want to bridge the gap between metropolitan and regional communities.

Understanding the Telstra Universal Service Obligation Performance Agreement (TUSOPA) commenced in 2012, it is reasonable to suggest that telecommunication technology has significantly evolved over the last 12 years and without reform it has the potential to surrender regional communities to outdated technologies with the potential to further isolate regional townships and communities.

Utilising higher capacity, faster and more reliable technologies such as Fixed Wireless and Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites has the potential to provide equivalent, if not better, services to regional communities. The idea of reform is to protect and improve consumer safeguards to ensure users remain connected, with faults addressed in a reasonable timeframe, and are offered alternative connectivity options.

For SAFPA, there is no question about the importance of maintaining a Universal Service Obligation but we strongly support the removal of the requirement of relying on an old copper network and support embedding technological flexibility to ensure the right technological solution can be installed to suit the individual location.

On behalf of SAFPA members, reform of the Universal Service Obligation Performance Agreement should be considered replacing copper technology with modern alternatives.

Yours sincerely

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