

9th December 2024

Assistant Secretary
Digital Inclusion & Deployment Branch
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: Jason.Ashurst@infrastructure.gov.au

Dear Jason

Response to the proposed Amendments to the Powers and Immunities Framework – Consultation Paper

The [Western Queensland Alliance of Councils \(WQAC\)](#) is grateful of the opportunity to make a late submission to the consultation paper on the proposed amendments to the Powers and Immunities Framework under Schedule 3 of the Telecommunications Act 1997.

By way of introduction, the (WQAC) is a collaboration between the North West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (NWQROC), the Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) and the South West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SWQROC).

Our three bodies represent 24 Councils across the north west, central west and south west of Queensland. This area covers 60 per cent of the State and makes a major contribution to the economies of Queensland and Australia.

At the invitation of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, WQAC offers the following brief comments on the key points included in the consultation paper.

1. Increasing some of the dimensions of already defined low-impact facilities in the LIFD to improve connectivity, particularly in rural areas

To state the obvious, improving connectivity in rural areas is a shared goal of all WQAC councils. However, building of “Larger Equipment Shelters” in rural areas that increase the resultant structure dimensions should seek to be similar in design, material, and construction to other structures in the vicinity to help preserve the visual characteristics and aesthetics of local towns. In this regard a larger footprint as opposed to height is generally recommended. This is also relevant to increasing the volume on co-located facilities in residential areas.

It should be noted that some councils have local policies aimed at influencing the siting of telecommunications infrastructure while minimising visual obstruction and inconvenience to the public when access is required to telecommunication infrastructure on Council owned land – for example.

Where this scenario exists reference to the council policy is strongly recommended in addition to early consultation on such matters – that is, increased equipment shelter dimensions.

2. Improving the resiliency of telecommunications infrastructure by increasing the permitted solar panel size currently allowed in the LIFD, which will enable the rollout of standalone power systems

The objective is supported. The comment in 1. above is also relevant here particularly when in township locations. The infrastructure resulting from the increased size of solar panels to provide standalone power needs to support / align with local town aesthetics and not stand out to avoid drawing criticism.

3. Clarifying cabling on bridges as a low impact facility

WQAC has concerns about this proposal and on face value is opposed to what is suggested. Bridges are critical enabling infrastructure that support various industry and community objectives including transport efficiency and social connections for health, education and sport to name but a few. The installation of cables on bridges without the approval of the relevant authority can have a major impact on regular maintenance and incident response processes. It can also restrict and/or complicate the work of other utilities seeking to use the bridge for their purposes for which approval is required.

As noted, by the very nature of these assets, bridges have significant inspection and maintenance regimes and as a structure ages, inspection and maintenance intervals shorten, and ultimate asset replacement needs to be acknowledged in any approval for the use of road structures by a telco. While a convenient option which often avoids sensitive environmental consequences of alternatives available, conditions associated with the use of the road authorities' structures must include an obligation by the Telco to meet all cost of temporary re-location and ultimate re-installation of conduits and cables when inevitable maintenance and structure replacement occurs.

4. Clarifying the requirement to provide Installation Certificates to Landowners and Occupiers

No issues identified here.

5. Emerging Issue of Public Health and Electromagnetic Energy (EME)

WQAC also wishes to raise the increasing incidence of councils being unable to undertake maintenance on essential water infrastructure (such as reservoirs) due to cumulative levels of radiation from telecommunication infrastructure.

WQAC shares these concerns as outlined in the submission by qldwater, which highlights that:

Our members require the Department to consider public health and EME risks raised by the water sector before implementing any further powers to carries. We note that in previous amendments to the LIFD and Code of Practice in 2018 and 2021, the Department excluded the consideration of EME concerns.

There are numerous examples where members have not been able to access their own critical water infrastructure to undertake essential maintenance because of radiation or unknown radiation hazards. In many cases, the data on Radio Frequency National Site Archive (RFNSA) is not current. Even where the information is current, the sites often need to be de-energised to allow safe access for workers. This needs the permission of the telecommunication providers – and where unidentified equipment exists this cannot be achieved. This is unacceptable situation for the water sector.

AMTA notes that while they *'encourage all operators in licenced spectrum and those using wireless access technology on Area Wide Licences to use the RFNSA to demonstrate their compliance to the standards, however it is not a mandated system'*.

WQAC hopes the above commentary is helpful to the Department in forming its final recommendations on the issues outlined in the consultation paper.

Should further information be required, WQAC can be contacted at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

NWQROC

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