



AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

ABN 57 611 736 700

Second Floor, 110 Mary Street, Brisbane, Qld, 4000
PO Box 13186, North Bank Plaza, cnr Ann & George Sts, Brisbane Qld 4003

Ph: (07) 3236 3100
Fax: (07) 3236 3077
Email: agforce@agforceqld.org.au
Web: www.agforceqld.org.au

Ref: MG/RT/GG23011

3 March 2023

Regional Communications Branch
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via Email: ofcp@communications.gov.au

Dear Sirs

Re: Commonwealth On-Farm Connectivity Program Discussion Paper

AgForce is a peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain and sheep, wool & goat producers. The cane, beef, broadacre cropping and sheep, wool & goat industries in Queensland generated around \$10.4 billion in on-farm value of production in 2021-22. AgForce's purpose is to advance sustainable agribusiness and strives to ensure the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Over 6,500 farmers, individuals and businesses provide support to AgForce through membership. Our members own and manage around 55 million hectares, or a third of the state's land area. Queensland producers provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, contribute significantly to the social fabric of regional, rural and remote communities, as well as deliver stewardship of the state's natural environment.

Thank you for the opportunity for AgForce to provide feedback on the Commonwealth's On-Farm Connectivity Program. AgForce are passionate about the future of farming and have a strong membership base seeking economic growth that relies on effective, reliable and affordable connectivity and its associated infrastructure development.

Connectivity is a large impediment to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support industry and business to expand and create regional jobs. AgForce will continue to welcome rural, regional and remote expenditure in the telecommunication realm, as per our submission to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Issues Paper. We implore all levels of governments to consider further investment in geostationary satellites and low earth orbit satellite technologies as these can have benefits over large swathes of land, as well as traditional hard line and mobile network coverage projects.

As a member of the National Farmers Federation (NFF), we strongly support their submission on this topic and duplicate the concerns highlighted around program eligibility and the unintended consequences of excluding some producers due to off-farm income, seasonal income variability or the result of utilisation of risk-management income averaging tools.

In addition to the NFF's position, AgForce would like to add the following:

- **Proposed Funding Process**

Primary Producers are seeking comparable internet options to their city counterparts at comparable cost. While a 50% rebate would be welcomed, our membership would like to see an 80% rebate on eligible equipment to more fully close the divide between the costs of connectivity in the bush and city.

AgForce supports the idea of a rebate to a service provider to simplify the funding process but would seek clarification as to the eligibility of an equipment service provider, to support as wide a choice of provider as possible. We would also encourage the suggested platform for rebates through the Business Grants Hub to be straight forward and simple.

How the government seeks to promote this program with potential eligible service providers will be critical to its success and to ensure an equitable playing field for all providers. The sample questions outlined in the discussion paper are generally supported.

- **Questions for Primary Producers**

Eligibility being restricted to an agricultural business must also incorporate all business structures in use including trusts, partnerships, sole traders and other common forms of farming enterprise arrangements, still with a caveat of requiring proof that they are a genuine farming operation.

Some of the questions posed to producers indicate they need to possess a relatively good idea of what they require for their business. Some primary producers may not have a good understanding of what technology exists and what solutions could be available for them. This section should have reference to the Regional Tech Hub being available to provide support and guidance in related decision making.

Lastly, AgForce would encourage the Department to consult as widely as possible with a range of relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- On-farm connectivity and ag tech providers
- Relevant research institutes and organisations including universities with agricultural specialties
- Telecommunications and Broadband companies
- Ag Innovation Hubs
- Peak industry associations

For further information or to discuss this submission in more detail please contact Ruth Thompson, Policy Director, via email: thompsonr@agforceqld.org.au or by phone: 0427 472 467.

Yours faithfully



Michael Guerin
Chief Executive Officer