



Tasmanian Government submission – On Farm Connectivity Program

February 2023

The Tasmanian Government welcomes the opportunity to provide the feedback below in relation to the On Farm Connectivity Program Discussion Paper developed by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts for consultation on the On Farm Connectivity Program.

General feedback and issues identified in Tasmania on connectivity

- The Tasmanian Government supports investments and policy settings that advance the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies and capabilities in the processing and manufacturing sectors which service primary production.
- While connectivity in Tasmania is considered to be generally good, the Tasmanian Government acknowledges that there are still some ‘black spots’ across the State that have a negative impact from a forestry, fishery and agriculture perspective due to the remoteness of the south and west coast regions.
- In relation to land-based farms, although Tasmania has a much smaller average size than many regions in other Australian states, Tasmania still faces on farm digital connectivity challenges due to its landscape and mobile black spots, depending on the location of farms.
- The Tasmanian Government considers that farms around Tasmania with black spot areas would benefit from digital connectivity equipment / infrastructure including Wi-Fi extenders, boosters etc to assist connection to on-farm sensors and devices such as:
 - Cattle collars for feed pad/dairy
 - Pivot irrigators
 - Auto opening gates
 - Security cameras
 - Soil moisture sensors.
- The lack of, or limited, internet connectivity in forestry areas can be a barrier to improving the performance of harvesting and transport operations as well as the safety of forestry workers and the sustainability of operations.
- Improved connectivity and real time data access has the potential to increase the efficiency of forestry operations including:
 - better coordination of supply chains
 - enhanced detection of mechanical problems in machinery
 - the potential for future implementation of advanced technologies, i.e. automation / remote control etc.



- Improved connectivity could contribute to enhanced monitoring of Tasmania’s protected and threatened species.
- The lack of, or limited, internet connectivity also has the potential for negative impacts on bushfire detection and emergency response times in forestry areas.
- Similar issues are experienced by Tasmania’s aquaculture sector. From the scale of oyster farms operating in regional areas to the salmon farms operating in nearshore and offshore waters, often in areas with limited connectivity, there is a pressing need to improve access to data networks and services.
- There is also a range of emerging needs for better connectivity in areas that are already part of the NBN and cellular network due to the increasing use of new technologies in various aquaculture sectors (salmon and oyster) such as sensors for real time environmental condition monitoring and reporting.
- The Tasmanian Government identifies that, from a safety, operational and surveillance perspective for commercial fishing vessels and recreational fishers operating in Tasmanian waters south and west of the State, there is a need to address black spots in coverage and connectivity.
- The Tasmanian Government, through the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, has received feedback from commercial fishers that the emergence of the new Starlink network is a potential “game changer”. Fishing vessels 20 kms off the west coast of Tasmania have reported exceptional uplink speeds and there may be value in supplementing access to such new systems.

Feedback in relation to parameters and administration of the Program

The Tasmanian Government requests that the following issues are considered in the development of the Program and its administration:

- How the approach, where providers will first supply and install the eligible product and then be rebated in retrospect, will be facilitated. The Discussion Paper appears to indicate this is the intended approach, but further detail is required specifically regarding:
 - Whether all products supplied by providers will be rebated and whether there will be exclusions relating to certain products.
 - Whether providers will be provided with funding certainty before committing to supply and install.
 - Whether there will be an annual funding cap across the Program and, if so, what this will be per year, and whether the cap will be apportioned by state/territory.



- Consideration to the potential risk that demand for grant rebates will exceed availability for any given year.
- Consideration to the methodology for assigning and distributing grants, including the process for prioritising grants or whether they will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Undertaking a network analysis of capacity versus the needs, to inform prioritisation of the grant Program. There is a critical need to develop an analysis of network capacity and to overlay that with the array of industry needs on land and within coastal waters. This would then provide a gap analysis of priority areas for different kinds of industry and technology support.
- With respect to limits on grants to each producer, whether the suggested cap of one grant per producer applies to producers with multiple properties or business streams.
- How the Program and points above will be clearly communicated to producers.
- How the Program will ensure that all regions, states and territories have equitable access to producer supplies and expertise.

Conclusion

The Tasmanian Government is broadly supportive of the Program and welcomes any further engagement to inform the development of the Program.





Tasmanian
Government

Author: Tasmanian Government

Date: February 2023

© Crown in Right of the State of Tasmania

Email:

policyteamnre@nre.tas.gov.au

<https://www.tas.gov.au/>