



FRASER ELLIS MP

MEMBER FOR NARUNGGGA



26 April 2023

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts
Attention: Director, Postal Policy—Communications Services and Consumer Division
Via E: postalconsultation@infrastructure.gov.au

Submission: Postal Services Modernisation

I contribute this submission to the underway review of the future of postal services, exploring how Australia Post can modernise its services yet financially survive in an increasingly digitalised economy; and do so on behalf of constituents from the Narungga electorate who have contacted me over the last four years on this topic.

This summary of constituent feedback validly, in my view, demonstrates Australia Post consumer expectations and reflects overriding community sentiment that its postal services are considered to be a vital, essential component of daily life (despite declining letter volumes) and that it is imperative, especially in rural and regional areas, that a viable Australia Post continues to meet its service obligations across Australia.

My constituent experience involves two specific concerns: 1. the withdrawal of postal services from small rural communities; and 2. the inequitable, ad hoc provision of mail street delivery services within townships.

CONSTITUENT CONTACT

The majority of constituents who have contacted me either live in North Beach township adjacent Wallaroo or in the Copper Cove marina precinct of Wallaroo, and they did so to express anger and dismay that upon moving into the area or completing a new home within it, they found an absence of mail delivery to their street letter box.

In lieu of this service, Wallaroo Post office has been and continues to inform new residents their only option is renting (albeit at subsidised cost) a postal box located on the outside wall of the agency located in the main street of Wallaroo (up to 7 km away) where their mail and notification of parcels is directed requiring travel to collect at their own expense.

In addition to the above engagement, residents of Coobowie, represented by Coobowie Progress Association, also contacted me in 2021 lamenting the withdrawal of Australia Post services from the general store, reportedly without warning or consultation. This service change was so keenly felt by this rural community that in my view it is likely to have resulted





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in residents having to move from this town, especially those without a car, the infirm or who were elderly and no longer held a driver's licence so were not easily able to drive to the next town to collect their mail.

During the Coobowie contact, and also from the North Beach and Copper Cove marina residents (the latter two areas with a collective estimate of 1,200 homes), it was made abundantly clear to me that Australia Post Street delivery is considered a vital essential service that is relied upon by residents in all townships, and that in its absence, residents felt isolated and vulnerable due to having to rely on access to transport in order to receive mail delivery.

Residents also reported feeling discriminated against, when seeing, in the case of the ever-growing North Beach township, nearby neighbours "in older streets one street over" with access to street delivery services yet they were refused this same service and instead only offered the private postal box option.

All lamented a lack of mail street delivery that forces them to unfairly invest in a post office box and incur fees, transport and fuel expenses that their neighbours who receive street delivery don't incur. (One example provided to me was of a resident who had resided at Rupara Road North Beach for four years who had calculated the cost of once-a-week trips to Wallaroo Post Office at \$4,592).

A reasonable argument presented is that the above service inequity goes against the obligations as legislated under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989: *(27 (4) Australia Post shall ensure: (a) that, in view of the social importance of the letter service, the service is reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business..*

Indeed, some new residents who had just built their home or had newly moved into the North Beach area (which of note, is not an isolated small rural township but rather an area attracting hundreds of people to recent substantial housing developments including Palm Cove, Riley Cove and North Shores) reported if they had known there was no mail/parcel street delivery they would have considered investing and moving elsewhere, and that they felt it ludicrous to be advised their only choice was a private rental box (particularly as part of their building approvals is the requirement to purchase/install a front garden letter box).

CONSUMER SURVEYING

I and my staff led a community survey back in 2019 in response to concerns raised about the





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lack of mail street delivery services within the Wallaroo marina precinct with its estimated 270 properties at the time (now likely since grown to 350 properties). In summary, from 155 letters sent to households (and a Listening Post meeting opportunity), 116 property owners participated in the survey, 105 indicating preference for a postal street delivery service to be offered and 11 formally indicating desire for no changes to be made to the current service arrangements.

Ultimately the survey was deemed to have failed (by 2%) to reach the Australia Post policy-required 25% of households needing to demonstrate a desired service change in order to trigger a review of services offered.

In 2022, my office re-commenced consulting with Australia Post management (via correspondence and including meeting with the Territory Manager Delivery SA) to relay fresh concerns received from North Beach constituents and to urge customer engagement (and surveying) for consideration of equitable street delivery service expansion in line with the significant township growth being experienced there. To date, management has not agreed to undergo a residential survey.

I confirm I have received combined contact about the lack of street service delivery for the Wallaroo Marina and North Beach areas from a total of 163 constituents.

IMPACT ON AUSTRALIA POST RETAIL OUTLET

Concerns were raised by Australia Post Delivery Manager Northern Areas & Yorke Peninsula Anthony Germinario in correspondence of 29/6/19 and again in 2022 with renewed contact with Australia Post Territory Manager Delivery Wayne Walkom, regarding the commercial impact of the loss of revenue of private boxes at the Wallaroo LPO should an extension of street delivery services be provided.

This is a concern that is noted to have not been at all well received by impacted constituents. Many posed the question, “why are new banks of PO boxes being installed instead of expanding mail deliveries?”

Quoting the explanation from Mr Germinario: *“I will take this opportunity to explain that the proprietor of the Wallaroo Licenced Post Office has received council permission and is in the position to install a total of at least 60 and possibly 90, additional Private Boxes at Wallaroo LPO. This comes at a considerable cost to the proprietor’s business and will provide residents in the Wallaroo Copper Coast Marina with increased opportunities for a subsidised PO Box lease”*

Mr Walkom in correspondence on 18/11/22 also noted that any service changes will,





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“severely impact their business as they will lose a number of PO Box holders due to this if delivery does get up”.

I note an alternative suggestion was made for an option to introduce a parcel delivery service only. Mr Walkom wrote: *“An option which has been done in other areas that were polled and did not get up, was introducing parcel delivery only into the area, but keeping letters and smaller parcels at the post office for delivery through their PO box or over the counter collection as per current arrangements. This option still impacts the post office as they lose revenue with delivery of parcels over the counter but not the same amount as the loss of PO Box revenue.”*

SOLUTIONS

Constituent consultation leads me to believe rural communities would accept less frequent mail delivery services as an economic solution (i.e., alternate day or weekly deliveries).

However, in my experience they will not ever accept inequity, i.e. being refused a street delivery service when their neighbours receive this same service – and especially are incensed at being advised by Australia Post they cannot have street delivery services because this would cause a loss of revenue for the local post office that relies on the revenue from the installation of private post boxes.

In the absence of any other options, it has been raised with me that it would be fairer for Australia Post to provide the private post boxes for free when other customers in their neighbourhood are receiving street delivery at no cost.

Constituent feedback also leads me to believe that an accepted and expected outcome of this review will be for Government to commence injecting funding to Australia Post to assist it to meet its vital Community Service Obligations, as per other Global examples cited (Italy, New Zealand, Sweden, France), and additionally, in order to provide supply chain resilience in rural and regional areas. However, it is also my belief that constituents whilst accepting the need for government funds to ensure economic viability of Australia Post services, they will not well accept the need for them as taxpayers to also bear the cost of regular and large increases in stamps to send parcels and letters.

Another option posed as likely to be accepted in lieu of street delivery services may be for smaller rural townships to have access to a bank of parcel boxes or lockers at a settlement central point for customers to walk to in order to collect their parcels. This was considered an equitable option to remove the cost of inconvenience and travelling to another township when all postal services are removed.





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ELECTORATE OFFICE SERVICING

A final point I make is the importance of Australia Post services to electorate offices such as the Narungga electorate office which I can attest receives daily parcels and letters and extensively uses the Unaddressed mail service, the latter considered a very efficient and economical service without which no electorate-wide mail outs would be feasible.

THANK YOU

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this small contribution to the review, and additionally have publicly urged local residents to have their individual say during the public consultation period. Thus, it is hoped that many contributions from the Narungga electorate will be received, appropriately representing the views from our rural patch in South Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'FJ Ellis'.

Fraser Ellis MP
Member for Narungga

