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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
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Attention: Director, Postal Policy—Communications Services and Consumer Division

POSTAL SERVICES MODERNISATION – DISCUSSION PAPER

Since 1985 I have worked with Australia Post both as a corporate employee and then a Licensee of a Licensed Post Office. I have witnessed a great amount of change at Australia Post in this time, none more so than the Retail/Delivery split of the organisation in the mid 1990's. Again, it seems we are now facing new challenges to the way in which we service our communities around Australia, and I welcome the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper with an emphasis on my experience in the Retail Network.

PART 3: Accessibility of services – points of presence - Post Office Network

You want to know.

13. How important is the Post Office to individuals, businesses and communities, including which Post Office services are most valued?

There are over 4,300 Post Offices located throughout Australia and although we are branded the same, we all are very different. Our location and our communities differ enormously from the community hub of a regional Post Office, the busy counters in Metropolitan shopping centres to the corner counter in a rural coffee shop. Each Post Office adds an enormous value to all who visit. We excel in delighting our customers. All our services are valued. Each customer has their own expectation when visiting a Post Office and we strive to exceed that expectation however small or complex their requests are. Individuals and businesses value Post Offices for many different reasons some of which are face to face connection with others, connecting with family through the mail system, paying bills, accessing banking services, collecting parcels right through to complex transactions such as passport applications and identity services. We are a trusted brand in our communities, a safe place where people come for a myriad of reasons like asking for directions, seeking recommendations, local information and navigating the digital world. Australia Post has

made it possible for business to grow online from anywhere in the country, offering eCommerce solutions at all Post Offices. Covid 19 highlighted the essential service that Australia Post is to every Australian, keeping them connected to each other in a global pandemic. We are valued, trusted and remain an essential service to our communities.

14. Are other facilities, such as parcel lockers, vending machines, payment terminals or mobile Post Offices, helpful to serve community needs?

All these service alternatives can be helpful when placed in the right locations with local consultation between Australia Post, Licensees and the community.

Parcel lockers are a great alternative to access parcels out of business hours making it more convenient for customers to collect. However, the remuneration for Licensees (fee paid by Australia Post to Licensees for services provided) for delivering a parcel to a parcel locker for collection is less than the fee paid for delivering a parcel over the counter in store. The cost of maintaining the parcel locker (electricity, cleaning, lighting, security) is borne by the Licensee and the cost to manage the incoming and outgoing parcels to the locker has no additional fee structure attached. The time needed to manage a parcel locker system needs to be a negotiated payment to the Licensee for the additional work required to make parcel lockers a value add to both the Licensed Post Office and the customer.

Vending machines have been used by Australia Post for many years and in the right location can fill a gap in retail counter sales for basic product offerings.

Payment terminals – or self-serve checkouts have also been around for a while. Some large CBD corporate Post Offices have them installed but for most Licensed Post Offices our focus is on face-to-face customer service. No machine can replace the personalised service that a counter operator can provide, along with knowledge and expertise that face-to-face interaction achieves.

Mobile Post Offices – a great initiative for areas recovering from fire, floods and other natural disasters. Some remote locations may benefit from a mobile Post Office visit, but most metropolitan and regional centres should expect to access a Post Office counter in a bricks and mortar setting not too far away from their place of residence or business.

15. Are there other services Australia Post could provide to better support the community?

Licensees are always looking for value added services for our customers and communities. We specialise in local initiatives, inclusions of local product and fit for purpose product in store. Bank@Post has become an essential service for most as we witness the closure of bank branches around the country. The Bank@Post service needs to be extended to all banks and financial institutions who chose to close a branch or not offer a traditional bricks and mortar setting for their customers. Australia Post need to be able to offer a more diverse range of services for the banks including PIN number reset, Electronic Funds Transfers, identity checks and loan applications on behalf of the banks. Exploring the idea of a Postal

Bank by Government and rolling out our own Australia Post Bank. Ensuring the access to cash services for all customers and communities. Both Federal and State Government agency business should be offered to Australia Post for roll out to all Post Offices around the country giving communities convenient access to Government services, supported and funded by the Government Agencies.

16. For Post Office Licensees and Agents – tell us the challenges and opportunities from your perspective.

Challenges –

The most challenging thing about this discussion paper for me has been the unknown. As a Licensee of a Post Office, both my husband and I have made a substantial financial investment to own and run our Post Office in Woonona NSW. We have served our community for over 27 years, and we are coming to the end of our tenure as Licensees. We have forged a successful business employing four staff members and striving to be the best every day. While I know that this discussion paper is the beginning of the process to change Australia Post, it is proving difficult for me to visualise where we will end up when this change is complete. Consultation between Australia Post and Licensees must be ongoing and serve to move through this modernisation process with positive outcomes for all.

I have been fortunate to be included in the pilot program of “OUR AP WAY”, a discussion around Australia Post’s history, the need for change and why we are changing. I understand that delivery of letters by the Postie needs to change. I know that in some locations there is an over servicing (high saturation of Post Offices competing for business) of Post Offices which needs to be addressed. I know that customers are driving access to parcel deliveries outside of traditional work hours.

Our Post Office is situated in New South Wales Illawarra region, a long 74km costal stretch of communities with Helensburgh in the north and Kiama in the south. In that distance there are 34 Post Offices comprising of 7 Corporate sites and 27 Licensed Post Offices. How our Licensed Post Office will fit into the reimagined retail network is challenging to visualise.

Opportunities –

If Woonona Licensed Post Office continues to trade after the reimagined Retail Network is complete, then the possible opportunities for our business and our community will be vast. We have already experienced the effects of the closure of a nearby Licensed Post Office at Bulli NSW over 10 years ago. This single closure changed the face of our business overnight. We were ready to take on the challenge of this closure and cemented our presence in the community that we serve.

We would be ready to adapt and thrive in the new Retail Network. We would have to ensure that any additional work provided to Australia Post by Licensees is remunerated accordingly to ensure the financial viability of the Licensed Post Office network. Some of these opportunities could include.

- Parcel Locker installation
- Increase in Post Office Box leasing offering 5 day a week deliveries
- Extended opening hours
- Parcel collection hatches
- Local Business marketplace in store
- Extension of services on behalf of Bank@post including cash access to all
- On demand Parcel Collection for business customer lodgements

Australia Post is part of the fabric of our nation. It has served our country for over 214 years. The services Australia Post provide to our communities are invaluable. Australia Post keeps us connected from around the corner to around the world. Australia Post is a much-loved part of our communities. This precious resource should be handled with care for all of us now and for future generations.