

## Submission: modernisation of postal services

- There are two separate agendas on the submissions page for modernisation of postal services:
- One is in the press release by Communications Minister, Michelle Rowland, and echoed by Finance Minister, Katy Gallagher. The other is the information provided to people who want to make submissions. Minister Rowland refers to “*a cherished national publicly-owned institution that provides invaluable services to Australian consumers and businesses.*” Finance Minister, Katy Gallagher echoes that. But the information on the submission page focuses on economic sustainability, employment, and rural cities and towns. No longer is it about the wider community or that this is an essential service which may not meet regular requirements for sustainability.
- The divergent aims are 1. “to improve productivity and revenue in delivery, while managing costs to support both sustainability objectives and benefits from modernisation.” But also to provide 2. “the postal services you want and need now and into the future.” We need both.
- Re modernisation: Australia Post must avoid the pitfalls of modernisation which too often increases costs and reduces services in the name of “technological advances”
- Sustainability objectives should not mean Australia Post has to return a profit. It is classified as an essential service, so profit-making is not its priority. There may need to be reliable subsidies. Government subsidises public transport and many other community services. To future-proof Australia, government may need to recognise the added value of a communication service that can survive internet breakdown.
- Statistics should be used more carefully: Instead of dire predictions about “billion dollar year-on-year” losses as threatened in 2014 by then Australia Post chief executive, we now find in 2023 that it is \$380 million – not a good result, but a sign that better predicting is required.
- Reduce frequency of deliveries. IF, and only if, this can be done without gutting the workforce. Australia needs a communications network that maintains *operational capacity* in the face of wide-spread destruction of cyber networks. Claire O’Neil, minister in charge of Cyber Security refers to “relentless” foreign interference attempts, and “a much too narrow lens on domestic security”. These threats are real as recent Optus and Medibank experience shows.
- Australia Post can place itself as an alternative that can be relied on in the case of comprehensive internet failures. It may not be Australia Post that goes down but as a network that does not rely entirely on the internet, it could be critical to maintaining communications.
- Not only rural and remote communities. Anyone with a disability and older Australians living in larger cities benefit hugely from our postal service as it is. Regular deliveries are part of that benefit.
- If the cost of postage has to go up, so be it, but that is a small price to pay now for a robust network that can stand up if there is widespread internet breakdown.