

Postal Services Modernisation of Australia Post (AP)

1. Protecting personal identity – delivery of identity/ banking documents

For well over a century, Australia Post has been the national delivery service for identity documents – passports, driver’s licences, as well as credit cards etc - and has plenty of ‘skin in the game’ in terms of the people, systems and infrastructure needed to securely manage such end-to-end services across Australia. It must remain vested in this service into the future.

Any prospect that these services could be provided by third party courier delivery agents, must be carefully assessed to ensure that there is in place robust due diligence of personnel and systems to ensure the safety and security of citizens’ identity documents at all times. Given the unlikely probability that such due diligence would be undertaken on an ongoing and continuous basis, the physical delivery by AP of citizens’ identity and banking documents must continue as part of the ongoing service of AP into the future.

2. Provision of known and trusted service - Correspondence in formal written form - a letter - from a government service, or government business entity, a company, a bank, energy or utility company, credit card company, or health insurance provider, to a citizen, physically delivered by AP must remain an essential feature of a future AP service. In addition to privacy data breaches, the online environment continues to see online scams and fraud committed against citizens, on a daily basis. Such scams increase in frequency and impact year on year. A formal written official letter is fast becoming the only remaining measure for a citizen to have confidence that the communication is, in fact, secure, authentic and reliable.

3. Enabling people to stay in touch, especially the elderly – letters, and other written forms – cards, etc, provide a tangible sense of connection, shared experience, familiarity and belonging, that dissolves the tyranny of physical distance and keeps memory alive amongst those who are more often than not, living lonely final years. Letters to isolated older people can impact their lives by reducing their loneliness and, perhaps, even improving their health. Letters help keep them connected with the outside world. Removal of such services will further embed their sense of isolation exacerbated as a consequence of the uniformly poor public health policy measures in relation to the COVID pandemic. It is accepted that a reduction in frequency of letter delivery is a likely outcome of the current review but the service must continue notwithstanding.

4. Essential service for those who lack digital literacy or who do not have ready access to IT – access to a terminal in a hub setting is not the solution for any of these people, given their lack of competency, familiarity or confidence in using online services (a recent Australian Bureau of Statistics report shows that 2.5 million Australians are not online because of affordability issues, location or lack of digital literacy). Many citizens continue to pay their utility and other bills at the counter of an AP outlet and re-directing them to an ATM facility/kiosk will result in distress, confusion and humiliation. Citizens have the right to live with dignity and to be able to function as independently as possible, given their particular circumstances. A person who is not IT literate will have no option but to rely on others - a family

member, carer, or even a neighbour - to manage these functions for them, reducing their sense of dignified independence.

5. Retaining a sense of community cohesion and identity, especially where other services, such as banks, have been wholly withdrawn or closed. From first-hand experience, our own local community in an affluent suburb 10 km from Melbourne's CBD has seen the successive closure of NAB, the Bank of Melbourne, Commonwealth, ANZ and finally, Westpac bank, all within the past two years. No community notification or consultation ensued and, in most cases, local residents found out when they attempted to visit their local bank, only to find the premises locked and in darkness. The impact on residents and local businesses has been significant. Locals now must travel to another suburb for their banking needs and that local knowledge, sense of community and cohesion and understanding of clients' needs has been permanently lost. Any plans to close AP retail outlets should heed the lessons of these recent bank closures that have left some suburbs akin to a service desert.

Kathleen Molloy-Charluet & Philippe Charluet

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