

Thursday, 27 April 23

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications
and the Arts
GPO Box 594
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Attention: Director, Postal Policy—Communications Services and Consumer Division

re: Postal Services Modernisation

Director,


I am the Licensee of the Gulgong Licensed Post Office in regional NSW.

As you know, there have been many enquiries, discussion papers, and white papers about Australia Post in recent years. Regrettably, they have not implemented all of the recommendations that emerged from them. I hope this enquiry will finally address the many issues plaguing Australia Post.

The Australian Government has legislated Community Service Obligations that Australia Post must follow. Unfortunately, since the creation of Licensed Post Offices in 1992, Australia Post has relied on the charity of Licensees to satisfy this obligation. In rural and regional areas, where operating a Post Office is not commercially self-sustainable, Licensees are forced to work for less than minimum wage. So rather than Australia Post fulfilling their Community Service Obligations, their rural and regional Licensees are the ones shouldering the cost of fulfilling the obligation for them. This must change. If the Federal Government believes that rural and regional communities should have access to a Post Office, then it must ensure that a private individual does not bear the cost of operating that Post Office.

The Postal Services Modernisation discussion paper asks many questions, but not this; Is a Post Office and post service crucial to the economic well-being and future of rural and regional communities? The answer is, categorically, yes. Rural and regional communities need more than just a bare-bones service. Due to the absence of most other services, the community's reliance on a full-service Post Office is even more acute. Rather than be a burden on Government, this should be considered an opportunity. Instead of continuing to fund outreach services and functions, the Federal and State Governments could roll them into a new Regional Post Outlet model, resulting in overall cost savings. Costs could be reduced further if subsidies from other critical services, such as banking and telecommunications, were included.

When the community suggests solutions like this, the response is that digitising services will eliminate the need for brick-and-mortar outlets and face-to-face services. The Government cannot hide behind this fiction as private corporations do. There will always be community members that, due to physical, mental, emotional,



financial or social reasons, cannot utilise digital solutions. And the Government must serve all of their constituents.

The recent COVID-19 outbreak highlighted our retail postal network's vital role in connecting people during isolation. Less than 18 months ago, we depended on this far-reaching network to maintain communication and access essential services. Given this crucial function, it is not a matter of "if" we should preserve the network but how to ensure it continues. The Australia Post Retail Network is undeniably a national asset deserving of proper funding and protection.

I look forward to seeing the Federal Government recognise its obligation to serve the Australian Community and reclassify Australia Post as national infrastructure, not as a cash cow to be milked.

Kind regards

Scott Etherington
Licensee
Gulgong Licensed Post Office