

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc.



Submission to the
Department of Communications and the Arts

Prepared by:

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President: Mr Bruce Paynter  
PO Box 2, GLOUCESTER NSW  
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Secretary: Mrs Helen Ponder  
Avondale, BOURKE NSW 2840

Dear Minister and the Department

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to your current review of the Viewer Access Satellite Television Service (VAST) offered throughout Australia.

ICPA NSW would like to offer the following comments.

1. In what ways is the VAST service appropriate for delivery of television in areas without reliable terrestrial coverage?

This is a difficult question as people who rely on VAST for their television viewing have no other service to compare with. Largely the VAST services are televised from the Northern Territory, so for viewers in New South Wales there is a host of irrelevant advertising and of course a time delay. A state-based broadcast would better service customers.

VAST is an appropriate option for areas without reliable terrestrial coverage as these are all the areas most commonly in mobile blackspot locations or locations reliant on data limited satellite internet. Live streaming and catch up TV, or any viewing via the internet is often not an option given the slow, unreliable and limited data available.

2. Are the current range of TV and radio services offered appropriate?

ICPA NSW would like to suggest that State by State VAST television and radio services would be more appropriate, which would give relevant and up to date information. This is particularly important when broadcasting disaster and emergency information.

VAST services should be able to offer all channels available to traditional digital customers in their state or area.

The most frustrating aspect of VAST for viewers is the constant repeat of infomercials and irrelevant advertising.

3. To what extent are VAST set-top boxes meeting the needs of viewers?

If set-top boxes are not available then there is no availability of television. As many rural and remote areas cannot get TV reception using a traditional digital TV antenna the need for a set-top box is essential.

As with question 1, households using VAST do not have the same access to internet as other television users. Additional features such as recording, and television guides have greatly improved the usability of VAST set-top boxes.

4. To what extent do the regional commercial news arrangements on VAST meet the needs of viewers?

Some viewers are unable to access relevant news stations due to their location. It is essential the viewers be able to access state or area-based news services in the future.

5. Specifically, how could the current VAST service be improved? Changes in the media landscape 2010 to now.

TV on demand cannot be accessed by many VAST users, with limited unreliable data, thus any enhancements in this area would be welcomed.

There have also been problems with viewing when storms are imminent, as this interrupts the quality of the service, with many dropouts.

6. How has the increasing availability of online TV content changed the way viewers access and consume content in areas unable to receive terrestrial FTA TV transmission? Changes in technology and distribution networks.

Some households may choose to watch limited 'catchup TV' or Netflix as a weekend treat, however with limited slow data, online streaming is not a common option and at this stage could never replace free to air TV. VAST services are also located in mobile blackspots further reducing people's ability to access online TV.

7. To what extent should future delivery models allow flexibility to utilise new technology to provide access to terrestrial television services? Conditional access

ICPA NSW believes future delivery models need to be flexible to allow access to free to air terrestrial television and the ability to utilise improved technologies. Television viewing is not new age, but the way people choose to access this has changed and VAST services can be improved to allow users the opportunity to access TV in a way that regular users can. Programming and content of advertising need to be relevant to viewers, especially if the program is televising up to date information regarding disasters and any other emergency information. This information also needs to be region appropriate.

Thank you for taking our comments on board with the review of the VAST Service. We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success with the review.