



21 June 2018

Department of Communications and the Arts
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By email: vastreview@communications.gov.au

Review of Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) Service

WIN Network is a member of FreeTV Australia and supports FreeTV's submission. However WIN Network is a joint venture partner with Prime Media in the company set up to manage the Western Australia VAST service, WA Satco Pty Ltd.

WIN Network wishes to clarify some myths relating to the VAST services being managed for the Commonwealth by the free-to-air broadcasters.

The WA VAST service provides the VAST services differently to the East Coast and Northern VAST Services. The WA VAST service is provided to viewer households which receive the program content which is an uplift of the WIN WA terrestrial service to the satellite VAST service i.e., it is the same service that is received by WIN regional and remote viewers. WIN does not sell airtime at all to the WA VAST viewers, they receive the same advertisements and news services as the rest of WIN's viewers in regional Western Australia.

WA Satco manages the WA Vast service on behalf of the Commonwealth and is funded to do so, the major cost being the Optus satellite cost. It should be noted that the Commonwealth stipulated at the time of the funding negotiations that the satellite to be used was the Optus satellite, this satellite service was non-negotiable.

In relation to the satellite VAST services, the commercial broadcasters were required to carry the cost and to manage the Conditional Access System and they have done so. The cost of such management is borne by all commercial broadcasters metropolitan and regional and is not funded by the Commonwealth.

The regional broadcasters were also required at their cost to uplift their local news services to the Eastern and Northern Australia VAST.

In relation to the closure of the Aurora Satellite Service in WA, both Prime and WIN worked closely with Optus and the Department at their cost in transitioning the Aurora customers over to the replacement Optus satellite.

The reference to commercial broadcasters receiving licence fee relief to in relation to VAST is not at all a fact. The initial licence fee relief delivered by the government of the day placed a condition on all commercial broadcasters to undertake the roll out of digital gap fillers at their cost. The regional broadcasters started up a company called Regional Broadcast Australia Holdings (RBAH) to roll out the gap filler program funded at their cost across regional Australia, the government also demanded that at every RBAH site, the broadcasters were to

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fund the installation of ABC and SBS transmitters at the sites and to maintain and bear the operating costs of the ABC and SBS. The initial cost of the 91 RBAH sites was \$17m funded by Southern Cross, Prime, WIN, 7 Qld and NBN. This project commenced in 2008 and the broadcasters are now unable to sustain the cost of operating costs and maintenance of the national broadcasters at the 91 RBAH sites. Representations to Government and the national broadcasters themselves have seen the claim for national contribution to the operating costs ignored.

Finally, the VAST service on the part of WA Satco and WIN has worked very well and we cannot recall a viewer complaint over the period of the current agreement. The WA VAST service has and is meeting the purpose of the funding deed. The service remains vital to the regional and remote viewers who receive the service today and for future viewers. The service is an important free-to-air service to the community, why would the government be considering turning it off and forcing viewers to rely on and to pay for streaming services e.g., the Optus FIFA World Cup debacle.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive Officer

