



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
2024 Regional Telecommunications
Independent Review Committee report

2024 Regional Telecommunications Review:
‘Connecting communities, reaching every
region’

September 2025

Introduction

The findings of the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review (the MacTiernan Review) highlight the rapid rate of change and innovation across technology and the telecommunications sector in Australia. Technology is connecting communities with fast, reliable and affordable communications more than ever. This is good news for people living, working and travelling in regional, rural and remote Australia, who, like other Australians, depend on reliable connectivity in an increasingly digitised world. However, there remains work to do to improve digital and connectivity literacy, uplift capacity and address connectivity gaps for vulnerable Australians in regional and remote areas. The Government has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening connectivity for regional communities including through the delivery, since 2022, of the \$1.1 billion Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia, and remains dedicated to enhancing telecommunications for regional, rural, and remote communities.

The Government welcomes the MacTiernan Review and has already begun using its 14 recommendations to inform policies and programs to improve connectivity in rural, remote and regional areas. It contributes to our commitment to reduce the digital divide, increase productivity, support economic growth and meet Australia's growing demand for data and seamless connectivity. The report's findings are based on community and industry consultations and will assist the Government to deliver modern, targeted policies and programs.

My sincere thanks go to the Committee Chair, the Hon Alannah MacTiernan, and the Committee: Mr Ian Kelly, the Hon Fiona Nash, Dr Jessa Rogers, and Ms Kristy Sparrow, for their expertise and commitment in delivering this review. The quality of the Committee's work in conducting this review demonstrates the importance of the Regional Telecommunications Review and its contribution to the development of telecommunications policy and programs in Australia. In line with the Committee's recommendation, the Government is considering whether the current legislative arrangements for the Regional Telecommunications Review remain fit for purpose.



The Hon Anika Wells MP
Minister for Communications

Government response to the Review

We are uplifting broadband and mobile connectivity across Australia through a strategic approach to regulation and targeted government investment.

Significantly, the Government has already made sound progress against several of the recommendations since the MacTiernan Review was delivered in December 2024. This includes commitments to significantly improve mobile coverage by establishing for the first time a legislated obligation to provide baseline mobile coverage across Australia through the new Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO).

The Uomo was announced by the Government on 25 February 2025 and will require Telstra, Optus and TPG to provide reasonable access to mobile SMS and voice calls outdoors throughout Australia. This landmark legislation, which leverages new Direct to Device Low Earth Orbit Satellite (LEOSat) technology, will provide new baseline connectivity across up to 5 million square kilometres of Australia, with significant improvements for public safety as a result. The Government is working to introduce framework legislation and is liaising closely with industry to monitor the roll out of technology to enable the obligation to commence as soon as possible.

The Government has also provided significant funding to upgrade the National Broadband Network (NBN) in regional, rural and remote Australia, including replacing the ageing copper network with more resilient fibre and the expansion of the fixed wireless footprint.

Up to \$3 billion in equity funding is being provided to deliver upgrades to the remaining Fibre to the Node (FTTN) premises in the NBN's fixed line network by 2030. NBN Co is contributing \$800 million to deliver these upgrades. This includes upgrading over 330,000 premises in regional Australia, enabling households to access up to gigabit speeds. This builds on the October 2022-23 Budget measure *Improving the NBN* of \$2.4 billion in equity to upgrade 1.5 million FTTN premises to full fibre, including \$1.1 billion for over 660,000 regional premises. In September 2025, NBN Co launched Accelerate Great which increased the speeds of the three highest residential speed products on Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) and Hybrid Fibre Coaxial (HFC) at no additional wholesale cost. This maximises the investments in the fixed line network upgrades, helping set homes up for current and future needs by providing access to speeds around ten times faster than the current average available in regional Australia.

Also, a historic agreement signed between NBN Co and Amazon Project Kuiper will bring high speed broadband to regional communities in some of the most remote places in Australia, via a constellation of LEOSats. The performance level of LEOSat-based broadband services is a significant uplift in reliability and speed for regional Australia, suitable for streaming content, video conferencing, working from home and gaming

purposes. LEOSats enable greater speeds (up to 400 Mbps) and more capacity than geostationary satellites are able to provide, including Sky Muster. NBN Co's partnership with Amazon's Project Kuiper will provide better broadband services for approximately 307,000 eligible premises in NBN Co's satellite footprint. NBN Co expects to commence customer migrations from Sky Muster to Kuiper in late 2026, with the transition scheduled to be completed by early 2028. NBN Co's LEOSat broadband internet product will complement investments in fibre and fixed wireless upgrades for regional Australia.

We will ensure essential telecommunication services are accessible, affordable, and consumers are protected against unfair practices

Since the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review, the Government has committed substantial levels of investments to improve access to and uplift fixed broadband services across Australia. The Government's targeted programs are also materially expanding access to high quality terrestrial mobile coverage and capacity, particularly in regional and remote areas where these investments are commercially challenging for industry.

While substantial progress has been made, especially for fixed broadband services, the Government understands the increasing importance for regional and remote consumers of having broad access to reliable mobile connectivity. This is why the Government is now taking steps to secure baseline mobile connectivity nationally. The Government expects the Mobile Network Operators to deliver the UOMO through a combination of their existing mobile networks and Direct to Device (D2D) mobile technology. The UOMO sets clear expectations to ensure new technology will be equitably available and there is a role for both industry and government in meeting this objective.

While the UOMO is the first step towards the modernisation of Australia's universal services framework, the Government acknowledges that it is not a 'silver bullet' solution for regional connectivity. The MacTiernan Review recognises the importance of broader universal service reform, and the Government has consulted on and is carefully considering potential approaches to improve delivery and funding of baseline fixed services provided to homes and businesses.

The Government is supportive of strengthening consumer protections and improving affordability for consumers, as demonstrated by proposed legislative amendments and extension of programs such as the School Student Broadband Initiative. The Government has taken a range of actions to improve consumer protections, including directing the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to make new rules on financial hardship support; domestic and family violence; and to improve customer communications in relation to outages and complaints handling.

The Telecommunications Amendment (Enhancing Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2025, if passed, will strengthen compliance and enforcement powers available to the ACMA. In particular, the Bill will enable direct and immediate enforcement for industry code breaches – including the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP Code). The Bill will also increase penalties for key consumer instruments by 40 times, up to approximately \$10 million, or more in some circumstances – with fines now able to be based on the value of the benefit obtained from the breach, or the turnover of the relevant telco.

The current review of the TCP Code is led by industry, and the ACMA is considering the Code and will determine whether to register it. The Government continues to closely monitor the review process and will make any further decisions that are appropriate to ensure the right safeguards are in place for consumers. The Government also expects industry to improve the accuracy and consistency of public-facing mobile coverage maps.

The Government agrees that the telecommunications market should be delivering flexible, different and affordable product offerings to all Australian consumers. While plans and pricing policies are the legitimate business concern of retail providers, the Government seeks their cooperation and innovation to make regional connectivity as affordable and flexible as possible.

The Government has demonstrated commitment and action in delivering improved access and affordability through the Free NBN Community Wi-Fi program. Additionally, the Government funds the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network's (ACCAN) independent grant program, whereby grant recipient, WorkVentures, is seeking to establish a National Device Bank (NDB) model through a targeted First Nations proof of concept, aiming to decrease the digital divide for First Nations communities.

The Government is considering lessons learned from the 3G switch off and is committed to considering how to improve the oversight of major technology and network transitions in the future (such as the transition of customers from Sky Muster to Amazon Project Kuiper NBN services), to ensure they are conducted in an orderly and safe manner.

Technology and network transitions can bring benefits, including better quality and more reliable services, but consumers, businesses and communities need to be confident that the telecommunications industry will manage transitions well.

We will continue to promote digital inclusion and connectivity literacy in regional, rural, and remote Australia, which will contribute to closing the digital divide and contribute to economic growth

The Government supports the MacTiernan Review's emphasis on the importance of 'connectivity literacy' for narrowing the digital divide between regional Australia and our capital cities, and supports the ongoing work of the Regional Tech Hub in improving connectivity literacy in regional Australia. The Government will continue to explore ways to enhance the effectiveness and reach of the Regional Tech Hub in the future.

A \$68 million package of measures to support First Nations digital inclusion, announced in the 2024-25 Budget, will further contribute to improving digital inclusion for First Nations Australians. These measures are providing practical outcomes to support First Nations Australians to take advantage of digital technology, and were informed by recommendations in the initial report of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group.

Through the NBN Free Community Wi-fi program under this package, over 20 remote communities who previously had poor or no connectivity are now connected over the Sky Muster service. The First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program will fund additional eligible projects to roll-out free community Wi-Fi solutions in remote and very remote First Nations communities using a range of technologies.

The Government will continue to consider the Advisory Group's expert advice, including the recommendations in the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap, which was launched in December 2024.

We will focus on uplifting capacity and resilience of telecommunications networks to deliver reliable and robust mobile and broadband services, including during emergencies

Since 2022, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to improving the mobile experience through its Better Connectivity Plan, including through funding for the Mobile Black Spot Program and Mobile Network Hardening Program, as well as its Peri Urban Mobile Program. The 2024 Evaluation of the Government's Mobile Black Spot Program, and other evaluations of current investment in regional connectivity, will inform the modernisation of future programs and ensure public investment remains well targeted and delivered effectively.

The Government will continue to press the industry in relation to temporary disaster roaming, particularly in the context of the UOMO.

Additionally, the Government's continuation of funding for Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) facilities will not only extend the operation of critical community Wi-Fi services at existing locations but expand these to a further 500 evacuation centres across Australia, ensuring preparedness and connectivity when people need it most. The Government will ensure that the STAND program is appropriately supported during NBN's transition from Sky Muster to Amazon Project Kuiper LEOSat technology.

The MacTiernan Review emphasises the importance of power to enable connectivity. The Government will continue to work with local, state and territory government and industry to address delays in connecting telecommunications infrastructure to the electricity grid.

Of further significance is the role of planning approval processes in delivering telecommunications infrastructure. The Government understands that obtaining planning approvals can often be a barrier and a source of frustration for industry when delivering telecommunications infrastructure in regional and remote Australia.

In terms of mobile telecommunications infrastructure, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Planning Ministers established the Mobile Telecommunications Working Group (the Working Group) in July 2023.

The Working Group provided advice on a coherent national framework for prioritising and accelerating planning and approvals for larger communications infrastructure that enable mobile services, such as poles and towers, especially in new developments and growth areas. The Working Group's Final Report, published in July 2024, outlined a set of agreed national principles for improving mobile coverage in these areas.

Additionally, in March 2025 the Government made amendments to legislative instruments under the Powers and Immunities Framework within Schedule 3 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Cth). The amendments made changes to the size and types of smaller equipment that are deemed 'low-impact' facilities to improve the deployment and resilience of telecommunications services, including in regional and remote areas.

Further, the Government's Mobile Black Spot Program and Peri-Urban Mobile Program require that connectivity solutions must include auxiliary back-up power supply for a minimum of 12 hours in the event of loss of external power to a site, without the need for further regulation.

The Government is broadly supportive of continuing to engage on program design, and potential changes to current programs, with state and territory counterparts and other stakeholders through usual forums and formats.

We will continue to ensure telecommunications services are meeting the needs of those living and working in regional, rural, and remote Australia

It is clear that governments, the telecommunications industry, regulators and consumer advocates will need to continue to work in partnership to protect the public interest, particularly safety, and to ensure positive outcomes.

Looking forward, the Government will continue to ensure reform, program modernisation and investment in regional connectivity is directed to areas of greatest need and impact, informed by the findings and recommendations of the MacTiernan Review.

The Government will continue to work to improve regional connectivity, speed and reliability so all people in Australia can benefit from connectivity-enabled access to health, education and financial services, social inclusion, economic growth, and critical communications during natural disasters.

Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee

The Hon Alannah MacTiernan (WA) – Chair

The Hon Fiona Nash (NSW)

Mr Ian Kelly (VIC)

Dr Jessa Rogers (VIC)

Ms Kristy Sparrow (QLD)

Regional Telecommunications Review Recommendations

1. Upscaling connectivity literacy

The Committee recommends a significant increase in the focus and resources for connectivity literacy in regional, rural and remote Australia. Limited knowledge and awareness hinder many users from navigating telecommunications options, selecting suitable services and maintaining reliable connections. Without addressing this issue, digital inequality will persist, and both government and private sector infrastructure investment will not be delivering its full potential.

The Australian Government should:

- develop a program to create Connectivity Champions to provide consumer support through existing regional networks, such as Australia Post, community resource centres and libraries. Connectivity Champions would complement First Nations Digital Mentors, developed with, and by, First Nations communities
- develop high-quality connectivity literacy training programs to train Connectivity Champions, communities, businesses and other stakeholders
- refocus the Regional Tech Hub and increase funding to expand its capacity, boost awareness of its services, and improve its performance in providing existing core services
- review the Regional Tech Hub's scope, strategy and governance at the end of its current contract period.

2. Improving the mobile experience

The Committee recommends actions to improve mobile services, including addressing diminishing mobile experience in existing regional, rural and remote coverage areas.

The Australian Government should:

- prioritise funding to improve existing terrestrial mobile network capacity, service quality, and resilience, rather than further extending terrestrial coverage
- continue funding new terrestrial mobile coverage for critical areas like roads, and leverage strategically located Wi-Fi hotspots where needed

- request the ACCC to conduct a new inquiry into mandatory domestic mobile roaming, considering emerging DTH satellite technologies and its effect on competition
- mandate, at the earliest opportunity, emergency mobile roaming during disasters and expedite the regulatory and operational framework for its use
- increase consumer and business awareness of terrestrial mobile network alternatives like Wi-Fi calling and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services for fixed locations
- enhance the ACMA's resources to enforce compliance against the sale and use of illegal mobile phone boosters and other unauthorised equipment and installation practices.

3. Expedite universal service modernisation

The Committee recommends the Australian Government expedite modernising the USO and the Statutory Infrastructure Provider (SIP) regime by merging them into a unified service obligation. NBN Co, as the provider of last resort, and other SIP operators would be required to provide voice-capable broadband services with minimum speeds and standards for all premises.

The Committee also notes that continued public ownership of NBN Co will be crucial to ensure that service standards are met under a modernised USO in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The contractual Copper Continuity Obligation (CCO) should be phased out where and when proven and effective voice-capable broadband services are available.

The Committee further recommends:

- NBN Co be tasked and funded to implement, in consultation with industry stakeholders, a plan to manage the needs of different cohorts of regional, rural and remote users
- the modernised USO be technology-neutral • the modernised USO be flexible, ensuring that minimum speeds, quality and other standards are readily adaptable so they remain relevant to changing needs
- premises without terrestrial mobile coverage have access to an affordable secondary redundant broadband service including optional battery backup, with government contributions as necessary
- when a modernised USO is introduced, the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) is updated and strengthened to provide appropriate protections for regional, rural, and remote consumers
- public phones (payphones) be embedded as a free service for domestic calls. Once current contractual obligations expire, the Australian Government should consider tendering for a provider to operate public phone services.

4. Consumer protection

The Committee:

- recommends a full review of consumer protections and service standards to consolidate and strengthen protections contained in a multitude of legislative instruments
- supports the ongoing TCP Code review with a focus on strengthening enforceable consumer protections, in particular, ensuring commission-based sales incentives do not undermine the fair treatment of vulnerable consumers.

5. Affordability

The Committee recommends:

- the introduction of pre-paid, low-cost broadband plans in remote First Nations communities, as proposed by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group
- the Australian Government facilitate extending these options, promoting affordability and access for all regional, rural and remote Australians
- developing an initiative for unmetered access to critical government websites for users on limited data plans
- ongoing availability and funding for the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) to ensure all school-aged children have access to broadband internet, along with initiatives to increase awareness of the program in regional, rural and remote Australia.

6. Develop a national telecommunications data platform

The Committee recommends the Australian Government establish a national telecommunications data platform. Managed by the ACMA or the ACCC, the national platform should include:

- For consumers: an interactive online tool that allows consumers to easily access detailed information on broadband and mobile service availability in their area, helping them make informed decisions about their connectivity options across Australia.
- For the restricted use of Australian and state and territory governments: information about the location of telecommunications infrastructure assets for the purpose of investment and emergency planning and response.

Telecommunications providers should be required to supply data to governments in standardised formats to enable comparisons between locations and providers. This will enhance transparency in broadband and mobile coverage and help guide infrastructure investments, especially in underserved rural and remote areas.

The Committee further recommends that the Measuring Broadband Australia (MBA) program is continued beyond its current contract enabling the ACCC to monitor service performance.

7. Regional telecommunications strategy

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a regional, rural and remote connectivity strategy. The strategy should be a vision for regional telecommunications and guide future investment and the regulatory environment for the future.

8. Modernising government programs

The Committee recommends that rigorous evaluations of the Australian Government's current rounds of telecommunications investment programs be conducted to ensure public investment is well targeted and delivered effectively. Further, the Government should ensure that future rounds of existing and new programs, are fit for purpose by:

- considering technology developments, such as LEO satellites and DTH capabilities
- mandating meaningful community engagement throughout each project phase, with special emphasis on First Nations communities both as title holders and consumers
- prioritising competitive retail and infrastructure options where viable
- addressing connectivity literacy and affordability • enhancing resilience and capacity
- recognising the value of cross-government collaboration and planning.

To increase transparency, the Government should create a public website to track milestones for all funded telecommunications projects. This platform would keep regional, rural and remote communities informed about infrastructure rollouts by providing regular updates on timelines, potential delays, and their causes, thereby building trust and awareness of government efforts to improve connectivity.

9. Support for the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

Recognising the value of the work of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, the Committee recommends that it be continued as a standing initiative. Consideration should be given to adopting relevant First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group recommendations across regional, rural and remote communities to address the digital divide.

10. Embedding community Wi-Fi

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- continue funding contributions for existing Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) facilities
- invest in new community connectivity hubs to provide community Wi-Fi services during emergencies and natural disasters
- expand investment in mesh Wi-Fi networks in remote First Nations Communities allowing a choice from a tailored menu of connectivity options that best meet

local needs and noting that communities without mobile coverage should be prioritised

- invest in and promote free public Wi-Fi initiatives in key locations across regional, rural and remote Australia.

11. Transition oversight

The Committee recommends comprehensive independent monitoring and public reporting during large-scale telecommunications transitions, such as mobile technology switch offs and the migrations required for modernising the USO. The ACMA could be well-placed to perform this role.

12. Expedite planning approvals

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government should exercise its power to expedite planning approvals for large telecommunications infrastructure projects, such as tower installations in regional, rural and remote Australia and in instances where Australian Government funding has contributed to projects.

13. Powering connectivity

The Committee recommends that regulation be introduced to require:

- minimum backup power periods for new critical telecommunications infrastructure installations in regional, rural and remote Australia, with existing assets to be captured over time. The backup period would be regularly reviewed to take account of changes in storage and network technology
- energy providers to give high priority to restorations of power for critical telecommunications infrastructure in regional, rural and remote Australia
- energy providers to prioritise energy connections for new telecommunications installations.

14. Evolution of Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committees

The Committee recommends replacing the current appointment of Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committees every three years with a permanent Regional Telecommunications Commissioner or Regional Telecommunications Advisory Panel. Given the rapid pace of technology change, increasing complexity of the market and the need to modernise the USO, continuous oversight is required.