Central Highlands
Regional Council

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15 May 2026

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications Sport and the Arts

Email: USB@infrastructure.gov.au.

Dear Sir / Madam

Submission - Extending Rules About Requests for USO Voice Services

Central Highlands Regional Council (CHRC) is responsible for a region in Central Queensland covering 60,000km^2 (nearly Tasmania in size) and home to 13 vibrant communities and a diverse range of industries: beef, cotton, grain, horticulture and coal mining.

The region's economic output is $22.5bn/yr with its 10 coal mines contributing $17.3bn. Other key contributors are:

- Agriculture - $1bn
- Construction - $1bn
- Manufacturing - $615m

The region supports 19,123 jobs

- Mining – 6704
- Agriculture – 1967
- Construction – 1511
- Tourism – 1210
- Education & Training – 1153
- Retail Trade - 1111

In short, the region makes a sizeable contribution to State and national wealth. In doing so its mines, farms, businesses, services and 28,000 residents rely heavily on communicaiton networks, including Telstra's, and services provided under the Universal Serivce Obligation (USO) for which Telstra receives $297m a year from taxpayers.

Council understands changes to the USO need to made from time to time to reflect circumstances and developmemnts in technologies, as is the case in moves to 'upgrade' services through wireless and satelite services.

Access to better telecommunications is a key issue for the Central Highlands, particularly better mobile coverage.

Council notes the large reduction in mobile coverage area claimed by Telstra due to complaints from rival telcos, the ACCC and emergency groups being upheld, and that the company's explanations on service dropouts from the shutdown of 3G have been strongly questioned. The 3G shutdown impacted many areas in the Central Highlands and Council has formally complained to local and regional Telstra managers and to Federal government representatives. It is a serious problem and underlines the need for the USO to continue, especially for home telephone services in areas where mobile coverage is patchy or non-existent.

As Telstra decommissions its copper network and moves to wireless / satellite technologies, access to telephone landlines needs to be maintained until replacement services are fully proven and guaranteed to work for homes and businesses without adequate / reliable mobile phone coverage. This is vital for families and individuals and especially for residents with medical issues.

Finally, scrutiny of how USO funds are spent is critical to ensure taxpayers receive genuine value for the services being provided.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Gary Stevenson PSM

Acting Chief Executive Officer

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