

20th May 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation (Standard Telephone Service – Requirements and Circumstances) Determination.

I live on a remote cattle property at Adavale, Queensland approximately 150kms drive from Quilpie (the nearest town).

The current telecommunications services that my household and business currently rely on are:

- CAN Radio / HCRC landline
- Starlink internet
- Mobile through Cel-fi booster

Mobile coverage at my house is only available with a Cel-fi booster, which does not work when there is no mains power. This mobile coverage is unreliable, and the mobile tower has limited battery backup. There is no mobile coverage away from the house (no Cel-fi booster).

Power at my property is:

- Mains power through a single spur line with frequent outages (for example in 1 week we had 5 outages)
- Partial self-generation through solar panels (does not work when there is no mains power)

During the Western Queensland flooding in 2025 we were flooded in for over 2 weeks. During the extreme rain we had 4 days without mains power and the CAN Radio / HCRC landline was the only form of communication and it worked the entire time. Without it, we would not have been able to get emergency help if we needed it.

For people in my situation, telecommunications are not optional. They are essential for safety, emergency response, business, health, family contact and staying connected.

I am particularly concerned about the proposed changes that would allow a standard telephone service to be refused where a consumer cannot provide or maintain “adequate power” for the replacement technology.

In rural and remote Australia, reliable power cannot be assumed. Power outages, storms, generator issues and limited access to technical support are common realities. Installing or upgrading batteries, generators, solar systems or backup power can cost thousands of dollars and may not be achievable for many households. It is difficult to find technicians and service professionals to install and maintain these systems.

Under these changes, consumers could lose access to essential voice services simply because they cannot afford, maintain or manage the power requirements of newer technologies. This represents a major shift from the traditional Universal Service Obligation, where services such as copper and CAN Radio/HCRC continued to operate during outages because they were powered through the network.

I am deeply concerned that rural and remote consumers are being expected to absorb the cost, complexity and risk of telecommunications technology transitions without equivalent safeguards or protections being put in place.

I am also concerned that these changes raise significant equity and human rights concerns for rural, remote and vulnerable Australians, particularly where access to essential communications and emergency services may depend on a consumer’s ability to fund and maintain additional equipment.

In my circumstances, the loss of reliable communications would mean:

- Inability to contact Triple Zero and get emergency assistance
- Unable to report power outages
- Isolation during power outages
- Inability to run my business operations
- Personal safety concerns

I am also concerned about:

- Maintenance and reliability
- Technology migrations
- Poor support experiences
- Weather impacts on satellite services
- Emergency communications
- Data security

I am concerned that these amendments are being progressed while legacy services such as CAN Radio / HCRC are already being withdrawn by Telstra and consumers are being migrated onto technologies with very different operating characteristics and reliability profiles.

More broadly, these amendments appear to extend and adjust outdated frameworks without broader reform of the Universal Service Obligation or adequate protections to ensure consumers are not left worse off following migration.

I respectfully ask that the Government reconsider these amendments and undertake further consultation with affected rural and remote consumers before progressing these changes.

At a minimum, the provisions allowing refusal of service based on power supply should not proceed unless effective safeguards, management plans for vulnerable cohorts and consumer protections are in place.

The Universal Service Obligation exists to ensure all Australians can access essential telephone services regardless of where they live. These changes risk undermining that principle for the very people the USO was designed to protect.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Rennick
Adavale, Queensland