



2026 Communications Federal Conference Report

Sally Brindal -WA

Despite advertisements to the contrary, for those of us who live where there is “nothing out here except massive chickens” (a reference to the Vodafone advertisement of March 2026) telecommunication services have become essential to the way we live, work, learn and stay connected. The Communications Portfolio continues to be a significant focus for ICPA (Aust), requiring ongoing attention and advocacy. While we continue to monitor emerging technologies and developments to ensure rural and remote students and their families benefit from improved connectivity services that meet their needs, it is equally important that existing communication services are maintained and not diminished in the pursuit of new solutions.

New technologies and enhancements to existing services continue to provide opportunities to improve connectivity across rural and remote Australia. At the same time, the telecommunications landscape is becoming increasingly complex, bringing with it a growing list of terms and acronyms: modems, routers, mesh systems, NTDs, fibre to the premises, curb, node and building; fixed wireless, 4G Fixed Wireless, GeoSats, LEOSats, WISPs, direct-to-device technology, satellite-to-mobile services, Sky Muster, CAN Radio, HCRC and the good old landline. Then there are the acronyms UOMO, USO and CSG. What do they all mean? And no doubt there will be even more terminology to navigate in the future.

The telecommunications environment is complex and ever-changing. Families need clear, independent and practical guidance to understand the connectivity options available at their specific location, troubleshoot issues, resolve phone and internet challenges and make informed decisions about the services best suited to their circumstances. The Regional Tech Hub (RTH) provided exactly that support. It became a critical component of Australia’s regional communications ecosystem, offering trusted independent advice to thousands of Australians. Its value is undeniable, with more than 28,000 regional Australians seeking assistance from the RTH in the past year alone.

The decision by the Australian Government to cease funding for the RTH is deeply disappointing and appears inconsistent with Recommendation 1 of the 2024 Regional Telecommunication Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) report, which called for a significant increase in the focus and resources for connectivity literacy in regional, rural and remote Australia, including expanded funding and support for the RTH. In its response to the report the Minister claimed the Government will continue to explore ways to enhance the effectiveness and reach of the RTH in the future. With the loss of this vital service, regional rural and remote families are left asking: where do we turn now? At a time when governments continue to speak about closing the digital divide, decisions such as this risk widening the gap and creating even greater disadvantage for those who already face the greatest challenges in accessing reliable communications. The loss of the RTH will be keenly felt by many families who relied on its independent expertise and practical support.

ICPA (Aust) has written to the Minister for Communications and a number of other parliamentarians expressing our disappointment at the decision to cease funding for the Regional Tech Hub and outlining the impact this loss will have on rural, remote and regional families. We have emphasised the critical role the RTH has played in helping Australians navigate an increasingly complex telecommunications environment and will continue to advocate for access to independent, trusted telecommunications support for those living outside metropolitan areas.

ICPA (Aust) continues to engage with a range of communications stakeholders to ensure the needs and concerns of rural, remote and geographically isolated families are represented. ICPA (Aust) remains an active participant in the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)



Consumer Consultative Forum and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), providing valuable opportunities to raise issues affecting our members. We also participate in regular meetings with NBN Co and Telstra and contribute to consultations on matters impacting our rural and remote families. In addition, ICPA (Aust) has maintained a strong working relationship with the RTH, enabling us to assist members with telecommunications challenges and connect them with trusted, independent advice.

These forums provide valuable opportunities to raise member issues, advocate for improved telecommunications outcomes, and ensure the lived experience of our members informs policy and industry discussions.

TELEPHONE

Landline telephone connections remain a significant and essential component of the communications services relied upon by residents in rural and remote Australia. Understandably, at the 2025 Conference, ICPA members once again called for services to be reliable, fit for purpose and maintained at a fully functioning standard.

ICPA (Aust) sought reassurance that Telstra continues to meet its Universal Service Guarantee (USG) obligations to provide quality, efficient and reliable voice services to rural and remote premises. Reliable telecommunications remain critical for students accessing education and for families living in geographically isolated areas. Telstra acknowledged the importance of dependable voice services for education access in regional and remote communities and reaffirmed its commitment to meeting its obligations under the USG, ensuring all Australians, regardless of location, have access to reliable voice services.

In February 2026, Telstra announced it would exit ADSL and CAN Radio, also known as HCRC (High Capacity Radio Concentrator), by 16 November 2027. The technology is more than 40 years old and is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, with replacement parts scarce and the specialist skills required to support the network becoming harder to source.

HCRC/CAN Radio is a legacy fixed wireless voice service that uses radio technology to connect remote and regional customers where traditional cabling is not viable. Uniquely designed for Australia's harsh conditions and dispersed population, CAN Radio has provided a trusted and reliable voice service for decades, particularly for those living without mains power or mobile coverage.

Existing customers will be migrated to newer connectivity technologies, which may include Telstra Satellite Voice – powered by Starlink, a standard home phone service delivered via the Starlink satellite network. Unlike CAN Radio, these services require power at the customer's premises, creating a significant shift from network-powered communications to customer-powered systems.

ICPA (Aust) continues to participate in the CAN Radio Telstra Stakeholder Reference Group, highlighting the issues and vulnerabilities these newer technologies present for families, particularly those outside the mobile coverage footprint. Moving to systems that rely on local power introduces a range of risks, in addition to increased electricity costs. ICPA (Aust) has continued to advocate for families to have access to two communications pathways. Historically, the combination of CAN Radio and satellite broadband provided an important layer of redundancy. Under the proposed arrangements, many families may instead find themselves relying on two satellite-based services.

Telstra values its relationship with ICPA and remain committed to:

- listening to community feedback and addressing service gaps through direct engagement



- collaborating with government and industry to ensure funding and policy frameworks support rural, regional and remote connectivity
- providing transparent updates on network changes and support options, including through our webpage and regional helpline.

Telstra has also stated that it will continue to advocate for a modern, inclusive, and resilient voice service framework that meets the needs of remote Australians - especially those relying on connectivity for education. Telstra welcomes ongoing dialogue with ICPA and government stakeholders.

CAN Radio forms part of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and the new Telstra Satellite Voice – powered by Starlink will also be subject to that obligation. However, without reform of the USO framework, there remain no clear standards relating to reliability, resilience or consumer protections for these newer technologies.

Correspondence from the Minister for Communications, the Hon Anika Wells MP, confirmed the Government continues to consider opportunities to modernise the telecommunications framework to deliver improved services for regional and remote Australia. The Minister also confirmed that, under the USO, Telstra has regulatory and contractual obligations to provide fixed voice services nationally on reasonable request, including maintaining existing copper landlines outside the NBN fixed line footprint.

While ICPA (Aust) supports efforts to modernise telecommunications services, any changes to the USO framework must ensure that rural and remote Australians are not left with reduced service reliability, resilience or consumer protections. As new technologies are introduced, it remains critical that the unique needs of geographically isolated families are recognised and addressed.

ICPA (Aust) made a submission to the [Draft Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation \(Standard Telephone Service – Requirements and Circumstances\) Amendment Determination 2026](#).

MOBILE COVERAGE, THE 3G SHUTDOWN AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

3G Closure

Following the 2025 Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Hon Anika Wells MP, Minister for Communications, outlining concerns about the ongoing impact of the 3G network closure on rural and remote families. In her response, the Minister expressed disappointment at reports that some regional residents had experienced a decline in mobile service following the deactivation of the 3G network.

The Minister noted that the on-ground experience of mobile coverage can be influenced by a range of factors, including terrain, distance from infrastructure, network congestion, physical obstacles, and the type of device being used. She also encouraged members experiencing mobile coverage or service quality issues – even after purchasing boosters or aerials to raise these concerns directly with the relevant service provider.

The Minister advised that service providers are best placed to respond to concerns regarding mobile coverage as they have the greatest understanding of their customers' individual circumstances and the performance of their networks in specific locations. However, the experience of many rural and remote families suggests otherwise. Service providers and retailers do not always understand the specific factors affecting mobile performance at an individual property or in a particular location. As a result, families can be sold boosters, aerials or other accessories that do little to improve access to mobile connectivity. This is where the Regional Tech Hub proved so invaluable - providing trusted, independent advice tailored to the realities of living and

communicating in rural and remote Australia.

Telstra still has a [3G Helpline](#) to support customers who are still experiencing issues following the 3G shutdown and has encouraged customers to contact the helpline if they continue to experience changes in coverage or service quality. Telstra has indicated it will work with customers on a case-by-case basis to troubleshoot issues and identify possible solutions.

Customers can call 1800 990 853 between 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday (AEST).

Telstra has not put a timeframe on how long the helpline will operate. Telstra encourages all members to call the hotline if they continue to experience issues as a result of the 3G shutdown.

Telstra has advised the following steps may help customers get the best out of 4G and 5G coverage.

1. Keep your phone's software up to date. Check that your software is current and network settings are correct, then set your network to automatic. **TIP:** To make sure you have the latest software update, power cycle your phone by turning it off for a few minutes and then turning it back on. This forces the phone to refresh its network settings and will bring up the latest software update available.
2. In a regional, rural or remote area consider using a Telstra Bluetick device, and where appropriate, coverage extension devices for home or on the road.
3. If using a Telstra Go Repeater or Cel-Fi Go, ensure it is configured correctly to boost 4G signal.
4. Check your location on Telstra coverage maps, while remembering that the maps are a guide only.

3G Closure:

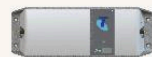
Check if your Telstra GO Repeater is configured to boost 4G signal



Telstra GO Repeaters (GO G31, GO G41, GO ROAM R41) operate on both 3G and 4G and will not be impacted when 3G closes from 28 October 2024.

However, in some instances they may have been configured to only operate on 3G.

We encourage you to check your GO Repeater settings, using a smartphone with the Cel-Fi WAVE app installed to see if it's correctly configured to boost 4G signals.



Telstra GO (G31) Repeater



Telstra GO G41 Stationary Repeater



Telstra GO ROAM R41 Mobile Repeater

Instructions to check your GO Repeater settings can boost 4G signals:

1

Download the Cel-Fi WAVE app available from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store on your smartphone.




2

Open the WAVE app on your smartphone and ensure you are in close proximity to your GO Repeater to allow it to connect through Bluetooth.

Follow instructions to:

- Check your GO Repeater in the Cel-Fi WAVE app using a smartphone.
- Tap on Settings > Band/Channel Settings > expand the 4G selection and ensure that each Band is toggled on (indicated as blue).



3

Congratulations your GO Repeater will now be configured to boost 4G signals.



It is important to note that fewer bars of coverage on a new phone do not necessarily mean less service – there are no 4G standards for signal bars.

Telstra have conducted extensive in-field drive testing, rigorous network data checks, and engaged independent benchmarking through Umlaut within Accenture - the same firm selected by the Federal Government for its mobile coverage audit. Telstra continue to monitor both network data and customer feedback and investigate any reported substantial differences in coverage.

Standalone 5G

The Minister also reaffirmed that mobile network operators made the decision to deactivate their 3G networks in order to free up radiofrequency spectrum to boost the capacity, speed, and reliability of their 4G and 5G networks. Telstra has commenced repurposing its 3G spectrum to support a 5G standalone network within those coverage areas.

However, accessing that network may require customers to have a newer mobile device and a compatible SIM card, as a handset that is simply 4G/5G compatible is not necessarily compatible with a 5G standalone network. As a result, some users may need to upgrade their handset and/or SIM card in order to benefit from the improved service. This is another example of the type of practical information the Regional Tech Hub was well placed to communicate, helping to raise awareness of changing technology requirements and supporting rural and remote families to understand what those changes meant in practice for their own connectivity.

Mobile Network Coverage Maps

Under the *Telecommunications (Mobile Network Coverage Maps) Industry Standard 2026*, mobile providers are required by 30 June 2026 to publish clear maps showing 4G and 5G mobile coverage across Australia to better inform consumers. The Standard prohibits operators from publishing any map representing 4G or 5G coverage unless it complies with prescribed methodology and parameters, effectively mandating a single regulated view of mobile coverage.

Under this framework, any signal below -115 dBm is classified as “no coverage”, removing the ability for operators to depict lower-signal service areas that have historically been included in coverage disclosures. Since the 3G shutdown, these areas have often been referred to as “fortuitous coverage”.

This differs from the *National Audit of Mobile Coverage*, which defines “acceptable” coverage as greater than -115 dBm, but also recognises “modest” coverage down to -122 dBm for 4G and -126 dBm for 5G, as well as “limited” coverage below those levels. Industry guidance from the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) similarly recognises outdoor 4G coverage at signal strengths down to -120 dBm and recommends that range to support consistency for international roamers.

The new ACMA Standard defines four categories – “Good”, “Moderate”, “Basic” and “No coverage” – with “Basic” extending to -115 dBm and anything below that excluded from maps. As a result, operators are therefore unable to publish parallel maps showing extended or fringe coverage based on alternative modelling assumptions or thresholds.

ICPA (Aust) has significant concerns about the implications of these new coverage maps for rural and remote consumers. A user may consult the published coverage map; conclude they are outside of mobile coverage and reasonably assume they will therefore be able to access satellite to mobile technology. Unfortunately, that may not be the case.

Satellite-to-mobile services generally require a user to be outside the normal terrestrial mobile network, and the relationship between mapped coverage, actual on-ground performance and satellite-to-mobile access is not always straightforward. This creates a serious risk that rural and remote consumers will be left in a telecommunications “grey area” - shown as having no mobile coverage on the regulated map, yet still unable to access satellite-to-mobile services because some level of terrestrial mobile signal remains present. In practice, this means families may be led to believe they have a communications option available to them when they do not.

Satellite-to-Mobile

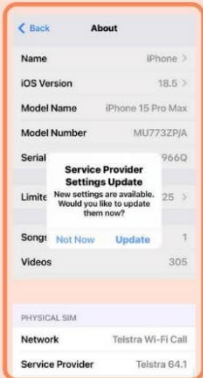
Satellite-to-mobile technology - also called satellite-to-device, direct-to-device (D2D), direct-to-handset, or satellite-to-mobile (STM) - is an emerging service that allows compatible mobile phones to connect directly to satellites when outside the reach of traditional mobile coverage. In Australia, the technology is currently being introduced primarily as a text messaging service and has the potential to provide an additional layer of connectivity for people living in or travelling through rural and remote areas.

The first commercial use is Telstra’s satellite messaging service via Starlink, which is available on eligible Telstra Upfront Mobile Plans (but not Telstra Pre-Paid mobile plans) for customers with a compatible device (currently including the Samsung Galaxy S25 series and iPhone 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 models). At present, the service supports text messaging only with the technology expected to roll out in stages over time to include voice, and eventually, data services.



Telstra Satellite to Mobile Tips

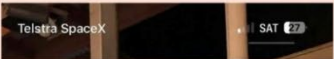




What you need

1. A **compatible device** – currently a iPhone 13, 14, 15 and 16 (all models) and Samsung Galaxy S25 series devices.
2. Up to date device **software**.
3. An **eligible Telstra plan** – Consumer and Small Business Telstra Upfront Mobile Plans (i.e. not pre-paid).
4. For iPhones – **updated carrier settings**. Go to settings > general > about > a service provider settings update pop up may occur – click update. To check correct settings look at Service Provider – which should be Telstra 64.1.
5. A **clear line of site to the sky** – not be inside a vehicle or house or have any obstruction such as trees.
6. Ensure you are sending text/emojis only – not photos or attachments.
7. **Patience** – it can take up to 10 minutes, sometimes longer to send / receive an sms.

NB: Do not have aeroplane mode toggled on. There is no way to ‘force’ the device into satellite mode.
You **can not** sms emergency services in Australia. You can not make **voice calls** using this technology.



←

The symbols displayed on an iphone look like this, the bars show satellite service strength not mobile coverage.



Satellite-to-mobile is not a silver bullet for rural and remote connectivity. At present, it generally requires:

- a compatible handset
- an eligible mobile plan
- being outdoors with a clear line of sight to the sky
- patience, as service can be intermittent and messages may not send instantly.



Importantly, current satellite messaging services are not a replacement for emergency communications planning. Telstra states that its satellite messaging service cannot be used to call 000 or 112, nor can users text Triple Zero directly via the service. While satellite-to-mobile may help fill some coverage gaps, it is still in its early stages and should not be viewed as a replacement for reliable primary communications services. Its limitations, including device compatibility, intermittent service and the current inability to support emergency calling, mean it is best regarded as a complementary technology rather than a complete solution to rural and remote connectivity challenges.

The future expansion of satellite-to-mobile services in Australia is likely to depend heavily on access to suitable mobile-satellite service (MSS) spectrum, particularly in the 2 GHz MSS band. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is preparing to allocate licences in the 2 GHz spectrum band in 2026, covering spectrum intended for mobile-satellite services rather than ordinary terrestrial mobile towers. This spectrum is important because it can support satellite voice, messaging, satellite IoT, and emerging direct-to-device or satellite-to-mobile services. ACMA's current proposal is to allocate the remaining 2 x 25 MHz of 2 GHz MSS spectrum by auction, with the process expected to commence late 2026.

ICPA (Aust) has concerns about the proposed auction approach. An auction-based allocation risks concentrating control of an important piece of communications infrastructure in the hands of the highest bidder, with potential consequences for competition, affordability and service access for rural and remote Australians. By contrast, administrative allocation can allow government to impose clearer public-interest conditions, performance expectations and service obligations as part of the licence framework. Given the potential importance of 2 GHz MSS spectrum to the future of satellite-to-mobile services and the proposed Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO), ICPA (Aust) considers it essential that spectrum allocation settings support affordability, competition, service quality and equitable access for rural, regional and remote communities.

PREPAREDNESS, EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS AND CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

Mobile connectivity issues continue to be raised consistently in a range of forums, with coverage reliability and the impact of power outages remaining key concerns for rural and remote families. Telstra is keenly aware of these concerns and continues to expand its resiliency programs and emergency response for the mobile network. Federal Government funding grants are providing some assistance in meeting the necessary infrastructure improvements to meet these requirements: [Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts](#)

Telstra has highlighted a range of preparedness activities and support measures ahead of natural disaster seasons, including encouraging customers to keep their details up to date, maintain backup charging options, back up important data, check whether devices are satellite-ready and consider alternative communications options where appropriate. Telstra has also indicated that support measures such as temporary call diversion, additional data assistance, free payphone access and temporary connectivity solutions may be made available in affected areas during emergencies.



ARE YOU E-PREPARED FOR A NATURAL DISASTER?

Telstra partnered with Justice Connected to develop a free online training tool that provides a simple guide to identifying your personal documents and how to store them safely. These resources remain available and may be useful to members wanting to better prepare their communications and important records ahead of a natural disaster.

Learn how to e-prepare for a natural disaster.





How can we help you today?



Learn which documents to store

Use our checklist to build a personal list of documents relevant to you and your family.

[Go to the checklist](#)

Learn where to store documents

Browse the pros and cons of the most common storage solutions you may want to use.

[Go to the pros and cons](#)





Learn how to store documents

Follow step-by-step instructions to safely store your documents on your own, or with support.

[Go to the step-by-step instructions](#)

AusAlert

AusAlert is a new national emergency warning system that will use cell-broadcast technology over active 4G and 5G mobile networks to send emergency messages to compatible mobile phones, tablets and smart watches during local, regional and national disasters. State and Territory emergency services will be able to use AusAlert for local and regional emergencies, while the Australian Government will be able to issue alerts for national emergencies. The system is expected to be operational from October 2026 and will be tested in selected communities during June 2026, followed by a national test on 27 July 2026.

AusAlert messages will provide information about the emergency, where it is happening, how serious it is, what action recipients should take and where to find more information. However, AusAlert will only work where there is active mobile coverage, meaning people in areas without mobile service - or where mobile infrastructure has been damaged - may not receive alerts. This remains an important limitation for rural and remote Australians who continue to rely on alternative communications pathways during emergencies.

Temporary Disaster Roaming

Emergency mobile roaming, also known as temporary disaster roaming (TDR), is a proposed arrangement that would allow customers of one mobile network operator to temporarily use another provider's network when their own network is unavailable due to a natural disaster or major outage. The intention is to maintain access to basic mobile communications during emergencies by allowing customers to roam onto any available network in the affected area.

The Australian Government has not yet mandated emergency mobile roaming in legislation, but it has been actively working with Telstra, Optus and TPG to develop a temporary disaster roaming capability. The original Government position was to work with industry to scope and develop that capability. More recently, there has been growing pressure for the arrangement to be mandated, including through a private member's bill



introduced by Helen Haines MP in 2026. Industry testing is under way, with an October 2026 target for rollout prior to the 2026-2027 high risk weather season.

While this is a welcome development, ICPA (Aust) maintains that temporary disaster roaming must not be relied upon as a substitute for resilient telecommunications infrastructure, backup power and access to multiple communications pathways in rural and remote Australia. Emergency roaming may provide an important additional layer of support during outages, but it does not remove the need for continued investment in reliable, fit-for-purpose communications services for regional, rural and remote communities.

SMS Sender ID Register

From 1 July 2026, only registered sender IDs can be used in SMS and MMS messages. Under the new SMS Sender ID Register arrangements, messages sent using unregistered branded sender IDs will appear in a single “Unverified” message thread on consumers’ phones, alerting recipients to a potential scam. By contrast, messages sent using registered sender IDs, such as “AusPost”, “Linkt” or “myGov”, will continue to appear individually under their registered name.

The new register, established under the *SMS Sender ID Register (Application, Access and Administration) Determination 2025*, is designed to protect consumers from scammers impersonating trusted organisations through text messages. It also means that businesses and organisations using branded sender IDs for SMS or MMS communications must ensure those IDs are registered by 1 July 2026 if they want their messages to continue appearing under their recognised sender name rather than being labelled “Unverified”.

Members should be aware of this change and treat any text message marked “Unverified” with caution, particularly if it contains links or requests for personal information.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND INVESTMENT

Mobile coverage and resilience continue to be supported through a range of Australian Government programs, including the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP), the Mobile Network Hardening Program (MNHP), the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia, the Improving Mobile Coverage Round (IMCR), the Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP), the Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program (RRAMP) and the National Audit of Mobile Coverage.

Under rounds 1-8 of the MBSP, the Government’s commitment has generated an investment of more than \$1 billion to deliver up to 1,418 new mobile base stations across Australia. Round 8, valued at \$21.1 million, is focussed on delivering new resilient mobile coverage in regional and remote areas that are prone to natural disasters, including bushfires, severe storms and floods.

The Mobile Network Hardening Program (MNHP) is also funding resilience upgrades designed to improve the ability of telecommunications infrastructure to withstand and recover from natural disasters, including backup power, site hardening and other measures to reduce service outages. Round 3 is providing \$9.8 million for 303 projects. The full list of projects being funded is available on the [Mobile Network Hardening Program - Round 3 funded sites](#) page.

The Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia continues to provide significant investment in regional communications. However, funding beyond 2026-27 drops significantly, which is a concern for rural and remote families who continue to rely on mobile and broadband services for education, business, safety and everyday life. While these programs are important and welcomed, ICPA (Aust) remains concerned that investment is still not sufficient to fully address the reliability, resilience and coverage needs of rural and remote communities.



The National Audit of Mobile Coverage is intended to better identify mobile coverage black spots across Australia to help target future investment and provide an on-ground mobile coverage experience, rather than relying solely on commercially produced provider maps.

The Audit commenced with a pilot in May 2024 and will run until 30 June 2027. The main Audit is currently underway and involves drive testing around 180,000 km of regional and rural roads every year for 3 years as well as longer-term testing at up to 77 locations, mostly post offices, across all States and Territories to capture seasonal variations in mobile coverage. The Audit measures coverage and performance across Optus, Telstra and TPG 4G and 5G services and is intended to provide a more realistic understanding of mobile coverage and performance in rural and remote Australia.

[Map of Audit Roads and Locations](#)

The map displays roads and locations proposed to be audited and may be subject to change. Queries related to the National Audit of Mobile Coverage can be sent to mobileaudit@infrastructure.gov.au.

Crowd-sourced data and data collected from drive testing and static locations are being updated regularly and made available to the public through the [Mobile Audit Visualisation Tool](#), capturing real-world user mobile coverage experiences.

UNIVERSAL OUTDOOR MOBILE OBLIGATION

The Australian Government is developing legislation to establish a Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) to ensure access to basic outdoor mobile coverage (SMS and voice services) across Australia. The UOMO is intended to require mobile providers to deliver reasonable and equitable access to baseline outdoor mobile coverage across Australia, including across the 5 million square kilometres of Australia currently without mobile coverage.

In October 2025, ICPA (Aust) tabled a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2025*, and in April 2026 attended the public hearing for the bill. A copy of the submission is available on our [website](#).

ICPA (Aust) has significant concerns with the draft legislation. In summary, the key shortcomings include:

- undefined service standards, including terms such as “reasonably available” and “equitable basis”
- heavy reliance on satellite and direct-to-device (D2D) technology
- risk to terrestrial infrastructure
- lack of guaranteed data services
- weak accountability and enforcement
- affordability and accessibility
- disaster and emergency connectivity
- unclear timelines
- implementation Risks

To succeed, the UOMO must be strengthened through clear performance standards, enforceable timelines, independent auditing, affordability measures and explicit protection for terrestrial infrastructure. Only then can it deliver on its promise of universal access with no Australian left behind.



Rural and remote Australians do not just need coverage, they need coverage that is reliable, affordable and resilient. The UOMO is a step forward, but without stronger definitions, safeguards and funding support, it will remain a missed opportunity to bridge Australia's digital divide.

ICPA (Aust) also highlighted in its submission to UOMO the need for explicit provisions protecting and expanding existing terrestrial investment, and for continued support for programs such as the Mobile Black Spot Program and the Mobile Network Hardening Program to be included in the UOMO.

INTERNET ACCESS

Members continue to raise the need for internet access that is commensurate with the educational requirements of geographically isolated students. While there have been significant improvements in rural and remote internet connectivity in recent years, ICPA (Aust) remains aware that many members continue to face challenges relating to service quality, speed, affordability and suitability for educational access. It is therefore essential that, alongside supporting new and emerging technologies, ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for existing services to be maintained and enhanced. Members are encouraged to continue providing case studies and examples of their connectivity challenges so that these can be raised with the Federal Government and other stakeholders to help resolve issues and guide future investment to where it will deliver the greatest educational benefit.

Following the 2025 Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Hon Anika Wells MP, Minister for Communications, outlining the motions carried at conference and reinforcing the need for adequate internet access for rural and remote students in terms of speed, quality, capability and affordability. In response, the Minister acknowledged the importance of ensuring school-aged children in regional, rural and remote communities have equitable access to reliable connectivity and educational opportunities.

The Minister also referred to the Government's support for upgrades to the nbn network to improve capability and reliability. In January 2025, the Government announced a further equity investment of up to \$3 billion, alongside more than \$800 million from nbn, to extend fibre upgrade pathways to the remaining Fibre to the Node (FTTN) premises across Australia and expand access to faster, more reliable broadband services. The program is expected to be completed by 2030.

Nbn's current fixed-line upgrade program, known as Fibre Connect, is progressively upgrading eligible Fibre to the Node (FTTN) and Fibre to the Curb (FTTC) premises to full fibre (FTTP), enabling access to faster, more reliable broadband services. By the end of 2025, more than 10 million premises across the fixed-line network were eligible to order faster fibre-based services, with over one million customers having upgraded from legacy copper connections to full fibre. Nbn also reported that earlier upgrades to the fixed wireless network are supporting increased demand for higher speeds and greater data usage in regional areas. Nbn has also been increasing awareness of Fixed Wireless availability through its "Check Your Address" tool, allowing customers to see whether improved services are available at their location. To learn about your nbn connection status and more click on the following link. [Check your address | nbn](#)

An important development during the year was nbn's agreement, in August 2025, with Amazon's Project Kuiper, now known as Amazon Leo, to deliver a future Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite broadband service within the existing nbn satellite footprint. The intention is for the new nbn LEO service, powered by Amazon, to replace the existing Sky Muster and Sky Muster Plus Premium satellite services over time. ICPA (Aust), together with other stakeholders, has participated in consultation processes to better understand the proposed service and the transition pathway for existing customers. This engagement has enabled nbn to capture stakeholder feedback and lessons that may support a smoother migration process.



At this stage, key elements of the proposed transition include:

- no-cost equipment and professional installation,
- uncapped data plans, and
- the continued operation of the existing geostationary satellite services until the transition is complete.

For rural and remote families, the move to LEO technology has the potential to deliver lower latency and improved performance compared with traditional geostationary satellite services. However, as with all major technology transitions, the timing of the rollout, affordability, real-world reliability and the management of the transition for existing satellite customers will be critical.

The School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI)

In response to questions concerning the future of the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) the Minister confirmed that an evaluation is currently underway to assess the impact on families and students, with early feedback from families reported to be positive. Introduced in February 2023 to provide free home internet for up to 30,000 unconnected families with school aged students, the SSBI will cease on 30 June 2028.

NBN Co is currently undertaking an engagement process on potential pathways to transition eligible SSBI recipients, subject to continued eligibility. ICPA (Aust) will continue to engage with nbn on this process and provide members with further information as it becomes available.

ICPA (Aust) has also continued to advocate to the Federal Government and nbn for affordable portable internet options to support the delivery of education to students from transient working families in remote parts of Australia. The growing availability of LEOSat technology and other transportable options has helped provide a solution for some families; however, no subsidy currently exists to assist families with the often significant costs of these services. It is also important to note that nbn does not currently offer a mobile satellite service.

Emerging developments in LEOSats and related technologies are creating new opportunities to improve access and expand communications options for ICPA members, both in the area of telephony and internet. However, the benefits of these developments will depend on affordability, accessibility and whether they are delivered in a way that genuinely meets the needs of geographically isolated families. Federal Council will continue to advocate on these issues, raise awareness of members' concerns, and provide updates as further developments occur.

COMMS DAY REGIONAL AND REMOTE FORUM

I attended the Comms Day Regional and Remote Forum in Canberra on 24 and 25 February 2026. ICPA (Aust) would like to thank nbn for sponsoring the cost of attendance. The Forum provided a valuable opportunity to hear directly from government, industry and policy stakeholders about emerging developments in regional, rural and remote communications. The Minister for Communications, the Hon Anika Wells MP, addressed the forum and spoke about LEOSats and the proposed UOMO. Nicolle Power from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts gave a valuable presentation placing regional, rural and remote communications into context and highlighting the opportunities new technologies may present to address some longstanding connectivity issues in rural communities.

The Communications Portfolio continues to be a rapidly evolving portfolio, bringing both challenges and opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australians. I would like to thank all Councillors who have assisted with the Portfolio over the past twelve months, specifically Amber Driver, Kym Ross and Louise Martin.



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Federal Council will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues at every opportunity, and ICPA (Aust) encourages members to continue sharing their connectivity challenges so that future developments are shaped by the real needs of rural and remote families accessing education.