

ACCAN Welcomes 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Findings

The release of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review holds promise for better connectivity for regional, rural and remote Australians, according to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

The Regional Telecommunications Review is a tri-annual process which plays an important role in assessing the issues impacting regional, rural and remote consumers of telecommunications services. The 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review, chaired by Luke Hartsuyker, has outlined more than a dozen key findings relating to issues such as digital connectivity, reliability of regional communications services, and digital inclusion.

“The 2021 Hartsuyker Review follows a period of extremes for those living in our regions, with many having weathered fires, floods, and of course the COVID-19 pandemic,” said ACCAN Acting CEO Andrew Williams.

“The experiences of regional communities during the last few years have highlighted and heightened the need for access to reliable, resilient and affordable telecommunications services.”

ACCAN is pleased that many of the recommendations from the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee mirror those put forward in [ACCAN’s own submission to the Review](#).

The Federal Government is expected to release their response to the Review in the coming weeks.

“We urge Regional Telecommunications Minister Senator Bridget McKenzie to act on the recommendations of the Regional Telecommunications Review in a timely manner. Australians in regional, rural, and remote communities deserve action now to ensure they have access to communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available,” said Mr Williams.

The 2021 Hartsuyker Review has recommended that NBN Co implement a product for low-income and income support recipient consumers across all technologies in regional, rural and remote areas. ACCAN has been advocating for a concessional broadband product for low-income consumers since 2019.

“Access to the internet and sufficient data is now essential to living our daily lives, whether we are using government services online or doing our banking. We’re pleased that the Review has recognised the importance of getting online and the affordability barriers that stop certain groups from accessing these services,” said Mr Williams.

ACCAN also highlighted its support for the Committee’s recommendation that the Government develop and enforce minimum wholesale and retail service, performance and reliability standards appropriate for each service type (fixed and landline, mobile, fixed wireless, satellites).

Mr Williams explained that Australia’s communications services still leave a lot to be desired when it comes to reliability.

“We’re glad to see that the Committee recognises the need for improvement, and hope this will encourage the Federal Government to respond to its March 2021 consultation on fixed wholesale service standards.”

ACCAN has also called for a number of wholesale service standard changes, including measures requiring broadband and voice Statutory Infrastructure Providers to provide Priority Assistance arrangements to vulnerable customers, and for improved timeframes for connection and fault repairs.

In consulting for the Review, the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee held 24 virtual consultations and considered 650 written submissions over the span of six months.

“The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee has demonstrated a commitment to listen to the communications concerns of regional, rural, and remote Australians. We thank Chair Luke Hartsuyker and the full Committee for their time and dedication to identifying ways to improve communications services for those living outside of our major cities,” said Mr Williams.