

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Regional Coalition welcomes push for data and voice in the USO

The [Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition](#) has welcomed the release of the Productivity Commission's (PC) [draft report](#) into the Universal Service Obligation (USO) with its finding that the current arrangements are in need of reform, sooner rather than later.

Achieving a USO that is technology neutral and that provides access to both voice and data is one of the fundamental pillars that prompted the formation of this Coalition.

NSW Farmers Association President, Derek Schoen, said: "It is pleasing that the PC has recognised that the current USO agreement is out of date and that voice and broadband access should be part of the USO into the future.

"A temperamental landline doesn't provide the connectivity that farm businesses need. Reliable access to fast internet is set to be the key driver of agricultural productivity. A modernised USO that includes minimum standards for voice and data is something that all political parties should support. It will have unambiguous benefits for rural, regional and remote Australians."

The current USO only guarantees supply of a standard telephone voice service. This is out of step with the services that consumers are now using. The USO must be broadened to also guarantee data services. We support the Commission's call for a "modernised and forward-looking approach to the subsidy and support arrangements that form universal telecommunications services in Australia."

ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, said: "It is also pleasing that the NBN is viewed as a key infrastructure centrepiece which can be leveraged. However, moving forward we must be mindful of how the rollout is progressing and that current challenges with Sky Muster, which have been acknowledged by NBN Co, are addressed. Existing issues with Sky Muster create questions about its suitability as the sole form of connection for regional, rural and remote Australians should the current USO be abolished. The coalition will be considering this carefully in its response."

President of the National Farmers Federation, Fiona Simson, said: "Reforming the USO should not lower the baseline service, if any change in this area results in a lower level of service to consumers in regional, rural and remote areas it would be very concerning. The timing of any changes that may be made will be crucial to ensure that no consumer is worse off in the transition or disconnected due to reforms. The order of any changes implemented will need to be given careful consideration.

"The challenge now will be working with the Productivity Commission and Australian Government to ensure that the correct transitional arrangements are identified and form part of the solution. Funding will be key, and as a coalition we will be carefully analysing the PC's recommendations as we prepare our submission in response. It is important that this process progresses rationally and with adequate consultation."

The Coalition is a group of like-minded advocacy organisations who have come together to end the data drought and champion better communications services for consumers and small businesses living in rural, remote or regional areas.

#### ENDS

For more information please see: [www.australianfarmers.org.au](http://www.australianfarmers.org.au)

Hashtag: #datadrought

## Members of the Coalition are:

- [ACCAN](#)
- [National Farmers' Federation](#)
- [Broadband for the Bush Alliance](#)
- [NSW Farmers](#)
- [Cotton Australia](#)
- [Isolated Children's Parents' Association](#)
- [Country Women's Association of NSW](#)
- [Country Women's Association of Australia](#)
- [Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia](#)
- [AgForce Queensland](#)
- [GrainGrowers](#)
- [Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association](#)
- [Victorian Farmers Federation](#)
- [Ricegrowers' Association of Australia](#)
- [Australian Forest Products Association](#)
- [WA Farmers](#)

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