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## Media Release

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### ACCAN voices concerns on communication services

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](#)) will tomorrow appear before the Productivity Commission at a public hearing in Sydney to voice concerns about its [Draft Inquiry Report](#) on the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

The USO underpins consumers' access to phone services, including payphones. While many may have never heard about the USO, it is an important obligation that aims to ensure voice services are available and accessible to all Australians.

"Unfortunately, the USO is stuck in the past and is not relevant for all the services that consumers need these days, including broadband – something which we are thankful the Productivity Commission has recognised," said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. "However, the direction that the Commission is advising may put some consumers at risk of a reduced service level, and being isolated from society and the community."

Phone and internet are essential services which should be available to all consumers. The mechanism to deliver these services needs to be reformed to ensure that it is independently accountable and transparent. Many consumer rights and protections hang off of the USO, so it is vital that the frame work which establishes the baseline services is solid.

Tomorrow ACCAN will raise concerns with the Productivity Commission, about the delivery of voice services over the nbn Sky Muster satellites, echoing concerns from regional, rural and remote consumers and groups. Late last year, ACCAN joined with a group of like-minded organisations to form the [Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition](#) to highlight issues specific to communications in non-metro Australia.

"Consumers should continue to have access to voice services without any degradation in the level of service," added Ms Corbin. "It is not satisfactory that consumers should be put at risk in such a way by removing or lowering the quality of an essential service. Fixed-line voice services are vital for some consumers, particularly older people and regional, rural and remote consumers. These services are especially important in areas where mobile coverage is inadequate.

"ACCAN supports the recommendations in the Draft Report that broadband should be included as a baseline service, but we think it could go further to ensure that the new regime is adaptable and appropriate in future years."

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*The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.*

Furthermore, ACCAN will be recommending that no consumer protections and obligations are removed from the USO until adequate alternatives are put in place.

[ACCAN's submission](#) to the Inquiry outlines a number of recommendations on the Commission's Draft Report, including:

- The need for an overarching transparent, accountable and enforceable right to ensure that consumers can access communication services and seek redress if necessary.
- To set out the parameters of a baseline broadband and voice service that is capable of 25Mbps download speeds and proportional upload speeds to all Australians.
- Further analysis on affordability of services and a review of the Centrelink Telephone Allowance and the need for a flexible community program.

For more information, contact Luke Sutton on [luke.sutton@accan.org.au](mailto:luke.sutton@accan.org.au) or 0409 966 931. For the latest updates, follow ACCAN on [Twitter](#) or like us on [Facebook](#).

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