



Hot issues

A telecommunications guarantee for the future

Broadband is now considered essential to provide access to services and employment opportunities, as well as entertainment and education. This is true for all consumers, no matter whether they live in regional, rural or remote areas or in the cities.

Reliable broadband connections are also pivotal for small businesses and farmers who often rely on them to run their businesses. Internet connections provide opportunities for farmers to use sophisticated agricultural software to monitor yield predictions and more. But when services fail, there are no guarantees that apply to internet services to ensure faults are fixed within certain timeframes. This can result in long outages, meaning lost money and productivity for farmers and small businesses, and frustration for general consumers.

The current consumer telecommunications guarantee, the [Customer Service Guarantee](#) (CSG), only applies to connection and fault repair times on fixed-line telephone (i.e. voice) services. This leaves consumers with no guarantees for fixed broadband (i.e. data) services.

ACCAN has been calling for [an updated CSG](#) to include service timeframes for fault rectification, connections and appointment keeping as the standard for internet connections. We are also proposing independent service reliability benchmarking to ensure that disruptions to services are minimised.

An updated CSG with service guarantees and reliability measures to underpin the provision of voice and data services, to deliver more accountability from providers and nbn, is also one of the five outcomes of the [Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition](#) (which ACCAN is a member of). At the moment, there are no requirements for nbn to publish information on repair times or network reliability metrics, leaving consumers with little transparency around reliability of services. There is a need for updated, fully accountable and independently monitored CSG arrangements and reliability performance measures.

At ACCAN, we often hear from consumers in rural, regional and remote areas who experience faults with their services that last for long periods and disrupt their ability to conduct business, educate their children and stay connected with the rest of the world. The lack of guarantees for internet services also affects consumers in metro areas.

ACCAN's [CSG policy position](#) addresses consumer concerns about existing customer service and reliability measures, and proposes a new model for the future. It is a step towards a new Consumer Communications Standard. The Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition is also calling for changes to the CSG.

We were pleased that the Productivity Commission's [draft report](#) into the Universal Service Obligation urges the Government to "proceed with its planned review of telecommunications consumer safeguards as a matter of priority." We look forward to the review of the consumer

safeguards in 2017 and we hope this results in an updated CSG that covers both voice and data services for all consumers and small businesses.