

I live in SA's Flinders Ranges, & provide a submission on the role of USO in Australia's Telecommunications Industry.

Whilst the sector has experienced significant change over the years, both industrially (competition, privatisation of Telstra, reseller companies without networks) and technologically (mobile telephony, internet & mobile data), Australia remains a unique service proposition. We are a "vast & sparse" country with very small populations over the majority of our landmass, but very substantial concentrations in a few geographically compact & discrete areas around capital cities & the eastern seaboard generally. This concentration makes it viable for network operators to install high levels of infrastructure to serve populations in those areas & to generate good returns on investment – “cherry picking” the most lucrative areas. However, the lack of population in most of the rest of the country & the huge distances/areas which need to be covered to service those areas (for the use of local residents & travellers into those areas) make similar service provision commercially unviable. If we retain the broad premise that all Australians are entitled to access basic services regardless of where they live - which I certainly support - & are of the view that telecommunications are a necessary & basic service in a modern developed country, underpinning social connection, business capacity & opportunity in education, health services & interaction across distance with others, then I consider it is absolutely necessary to retain USO in the provision of telecommunication services to rural & remote areas. European countries cited in the OECD table of how provision is managed in other countries all have much higher population concentrations in a more compact geographic area, mitigating service issues. Tourists now expect such access, economic development requires it. As such service cannot be economically provided, it does require an alternate funding mechanism