

The thrust of the existing Telecommunications USO legislation (TCPSS Act 1999 – draft report glossary p. xvii and p8) is to ensure that voice and voice equivalent telecommunications services (interpreted in the technology of that time as ‘the standard telephone service, payphones and prescribed carriage services’) are reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business.

At the very least, any future arrangements should not diminish that legislated obligation, regardless of

- who the provider is
- what current or future technologies are employed to meet it
- how the obligation is funded and implemented
- whether the obligation is extended to include broadband services.

The 90,000 premises (if that is the correct number) plus individuals who do not have a premises plus those people who carry on business away from a premises, in areas not reached by mobile services, together with those people who need a voice equivalent service, ultimately depend on this legislation for their baseline telecommunications service.

The draft report has failed to address the need to maintain this fundamental legislated protection. There is no guarantee that Government funded targeted programs or other non-legislated alternatives including NBN satellite voice or possible future commercially supplied mobile phone services will be a sufficient and reliable and permanent substitute.

There is no need to be greatly concerned that the technologies of the 1990s and earlier will need to be replaced (and the legislation should not be technologically prescriptive in that regard), but there is a need to be concerned that the thrust of the USO in the 1999 Act and its predecessors, and the essential service that they ensured for all Australians, will be watered down.

Recommendation

Create a recommendation preceding Recommendation 7.1 that maintains a legislated obligation to ensure voice and voice equivalent telecommunications are reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business.

Andrew Crouch

Alice Springs

1/2/17