

I would like to strongly oppose any change to the USO which results in rural, remote or regional persons being forced to rely on VOIP as their sole means of communication. I have lived and worked in remote areas in the Northern Territory, western Queensland and western New South Wales. I have not had mobile phone service at my place of residence for almost a decade and in that time, I have not experienced an internet connection that was reliable and always accessible. I believe a forced transfer to VOIP as our sole means of communication will leave us in an unsafe situation and possibly result in us leaving our home.

One of my biggest fears as a mother of two boys under 5 living remotely is that they will have an accident or emergency and I will be too far from help to save them. Currently I can call 000 or the Flying Doctors but I fear that removing or changing the USO and forcing us on to a VOIP service could leave us in a situation where the internet is down at the exact moment in time that we need to phone for emergency assistance. A cursory glance at the number of outages across the SkyMuster service shows that this is not unfounded or a hysterical view, as some have commented.

We also employ staff on our property and work hard to ensure Workplace Health and Safety measures are in place, are effective and we try our hardest to ensure the young people in our care, often a long way from home are equally safe. However as a long time employee and employer in the Agriculture Industry I know serious accidents happen and I want to feel sure that if we have someone else's son or daughter in our care that in the worst case situation we can phone for help. We can't just get on our mobiles, it's an hour drive before we get intermittent mobile service, we can't just ask the neighbours, they're a half hour drive away, I understand that the majority of people in Australia might be able to live their lives exactly the same without a USO in place but not us, not people who live in remote areas.

Perhaps if the NBN SkyMuster Satellite service that we are connected to had been a perfect solution to our previous internet issues and was working flawlessly with minimal service interruptions and no slow-down in service at peak times then VOIP would be a viable alternative. But that is far from the case, just this week I have received over 6 emails regarding maintenance shutdowns that will occur at various times overnight and have experienced huge frustrations trying to open websites at peak times of the day.

If the current USO is to be removed or changed it must be with people in remote areas in mind, there must be some way that we can ALWAYS access basic first aid services. The current alternatives are not reliable and therefore are not the answer and until the answer is found, we NEED a landline and therefore NEED a USO in place for us.