

**Internet
Australia**



NEWS RELEASE – 24 January 2016
Internet Australia responds to Productivity Commission USO inquiry
"The Internet is for Everyone"

Internet Australia, the NFP peak body representing Internet users, has told the Productivity Commission it believes the telecommunications Universal Service Obligation should be expanded to include a right to Internet access via fast and affordable broadband.

The Commission is currently holding an inquiry into the USO, which was originally designed to ensure that everyone could have access to a traditional telephone service.

CEO Laurie Patton says "our response is based on the underlying principle of the global Internet Society, of which we are a chapter, that 'The Internet Is For Everyone'. For many people these days Internet access is as important as having a telephone, perhaps more important".

In a submission to the Productivity Commission, IA noted a United Nations resolution on "The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet" dated 27 June 2016. In its resolution the UN calls for "national Internet-related public policies that have the objective of universal access and enjoyment of human rights at their core". IA also noted that 2016 is The National Year of Digital Inclusion.

IA's submission states "that in the 21st Century access to the Internet is an essential service. Accordingly, we submit that the provisions of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) need to be expanded so as to ensure that in future access to the Internet via a suitable fast and reliable broadband connection is universally available, just as they now provide an entitlement to a telephone service".

The submission contains four recommendations:

- 1. The Universal Service Obligation be extended to include the provision of broadband services that deliver access to the Internet and are reasonably accessible to all Australians.**
- 2. That the Universal Service Obligation be expanded from a voice telephony service or its equivalent, to include a minimum level of broadband service; and that appropriate minimum performance standards and benchmarks for technology neutral broadband services be set.**
- 3. That the Universal Service Obligation include provisions that ensure that access to the Internet via a suitable fast and reliable broadband connection is available at an affordable price determined in collaboration with appropriate government and non-**

government welfare agencies and consumer representatives.

4. That the delivery of Internet access via a suitable fast and reliable broadband connection be funded by government.

The IA submission states:

"The underlying rationale for governments to impose universal service obligations on private sector providers of essential services is to create a form of safety net for citizens who because of financial hardship, disability, or remoteness of location will not receive adequate minimum services through the actions of the market".

"Traditional telephony technologies are increasingly redundant in the Australian market place, and it is clear that the existing universal service obligations are failing to deliver an adequate safety net for citizens in accessing modern communications technologies. It is for this reason that Internet Australia considers that governments should broaden the concept of universal service to encompass access to the Internet via a suitable fast and reliable broadband connection. Access to the Internet should include both appropriate upload and download speeds, be affordable, and in particular should be available to people in rural, regional and remote areas and to people with disabilities".

IA notes that the current USO is funded in part by an industry levy with additional government support. It argues that the cost of an expanded USO (the delivery of Internet access via broadband) should be funded by government.

IA's submission highlights the need for an effective mechanism to deliver an expanded USO, pointing to the fact that the National Broadband Network only provides a wholesale service and relies on third parties to sell to consumers.

"Delivery of Internet access via broadband under an expanded USO would involve collaboration between the National Broadband Network company and the Retail Service Providers that stand between the NBN and retail consumers. Such collaboration would include both logistical / technical considerations as well as pricing mechanisms".

"Internet Australia is one of the appropriate bodies to help to advise the Commission on ways in which this collaboration should be structured, and we could do this in collaboration with those of our members who provide RSP services, as well as through further research into this matter".

IA has already met with the Productivity Commission and was afforded the opportunity to provide some initial input into the preparation of the Issues Paper. It has offered to provide additional technical assistance to the Commission as it finalises its recommendations.

'Keeping the USO appropriate in an increasingly Internet-dependent world should be a top priority for the Australian government. Failure to ensure universal access to the Internet will entrench a 'digital divide' and cause greater hardship for already disadvantaged groups and individuals", Mr Patton concluded.

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About Internet Australia

Internet Australia is the not-for-profit peak organisation representing everyone who uses the Internet. Our mission – “Helping Shape Our Internet Future” – is to promote Internet developments for the benefit of the whole community, including business, educational, government and private

Internet users. We are a broad member-based organisation not an industry lobby group. Our directors and members hold significant roles in Internet-related organisations and enable us to provide high level policy and technical information to Internet user groups, governments and regulatory authorities. Through our participation as the Australian chapter of the global Internet Society we contribute to the development of international Internet regulations and policies.