THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts

THE HON MARK COULTON MP

Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

21 February 2020

Have your say on the Regional Connectivity Program guidelines

The Coalition Government has today commenced the next stage of consultation on the $53 million Regional Connectivity Program to improve digital connectivity in regional and rural Australia.

The Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, today released the draft program guidelines for a final period of public consultation.

The Regional Connectivity Program will provide competitive grants allowing investment in projects that improve internet accessibility in regional, rural and remote communities.

"We recognise that access to telecommunications services are vital for people living in the bush and that different communities have varying needs. The Regional Connectivity Program prioritises bespoke solutions rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach," Minister Fletcher said.

"The program aims to complement the National Broadband Network (NBN) with tailored mobile and broadband services to support local agriculture, tourism and resources sectors, and help address health and educational priorities."

Minister Coulton said it is important that all views are heard in the design of the final program guidelines, including from communities, all levels of government, consumer groups and telcos.

"People living and working in our regions need access to fast and reliable telecommunications to go about almost every aspect of their lives. I encourage everyone who is interested, to have their say on the guidelines," Minister Coulton said.

"The Regional Connectivity Program will make it easier for people in remote areas to communicate and help to address the tyranny of distance for businesses, so it's important we receive a range of feedback to get this program right."

Consultation is open for three weeks until Friday, 13 March 2020 at 5:00pm (AEDT) and submissions can be made through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications' website: www.communications.gov.au/regional-connectivity-guidelines

The Government is also launching an online noticeboard to help foster links between communities and telecommunications providers to help develop potential Regional Connectivity Program projects.

Projects can now be registered on the noticeboard. State, Territory and Local Governments, regional development authorities, industry, business and community groups, not-for-profits and First Nations community controlled organisations are particularly invited to register their potential telecommunications project on the Noticeboard: www.communications.gov.au/regional-connectivity-program

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Background

The Regional Connectivity Program is part of the $220 million Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package, announced in the Government's response to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

The rollout of the NBN and the Universal Service Guarantee provide a base level of telecommunications services across Australia.

With the initial NBN rollout almost complete in regional Australia, there is a need for the network to be complemented in some areas with tailored solutions that address local priorities. The Regional Connectivity Program will complement the NBN, the Mobile Black Spot Program and the telecommunications industry's commercial investment plans.

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