MEDIA RELEASE

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Useful telecommunications tips for working from home in the 'Keeping Australia Connected' resource

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, today welcomed the *'Keeping Australians Connected'* resource launched by the Australian telecommunications sector, through peak bodies Communications Alliance and the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA).

This document contains many practical tips for Australians working from home including:

- If your call does not go through, consider setting your mobile handset to make Wi-Fi calls
- Schedule video conferences to start at times other than on the hour or the half hour
- Download and upload large files outside of peak times wherever possible.

This resource also explains what is happening in our telecommunications networks, with daytime traffic on the NBN up around 70 per cent, and on mobile networks up to 40 per cent.

"Over the course of a few weeks, we've seen a significant and rapid shift towards remote working as Australians respond to COVID-19 social distancing measures. This has led to a substantial increase in demand on Australia's telecommunications networks," Minister Fletcher said.

"Australia's telco sector is working hard to keep our networks running and to meet the needs of Australians as so many of us work or study from home at this difficult time.

"The Morrison Government is engaging closely with the sector as they do this vital work."

The *Keeping Australians Connected* resource will be regularly updated by Communications Alliance and AMTA, so it remains a reliable source of advice for Australian telecommunications users.

Keeping Australians Connected is available here: https://www.commsalliance.com.au/hot-topics/covid-19

Media contacts:

Brad Hatch | 0448 162 679 | Brad.Hatch@communications.gov.au
Rebecca Papillo | 0439 892 771 | Rebecca.Papillo@communications.gov.au

<u>**COMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE AND AMTA:**</u>

KEEPING AUSTRALIA CONNECTED – THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Australia's communication networks - responding to COVID-19

- Demands on telecommunications networks in Australian and internationally continue to increase substantially due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, particularly as more people are now working from home and education is being moved online. The whole profile of daily demand on networks has changed, with much more traffic being carried throughout the daylight hours and in non-CBD areas than previously.

- Telcos are working closely with Government and each other to ensure that Australia stays connected. There has been some disruption at times to some types of voice services – for example to some Government sites that use 1800, 13 or 1300 numbers and where demand has skyrocketed.

- So far there has been no widespread impacts on data services, such as broadband.

- All providers are working hard to minimise any disruptions and maintain our vital communication networks, including the provisioning of extra capacity wherever the risk of congestion becomes apparent. This includes Triple Zero and other emergency service communications.

- While Telcos will keep stores open where possible and in accordance with social distancing policies; there will be some retail closures and/or reduced staffing levels. We strongly encourage customers to first try online self-service options and check providers' websites for up-to-date information before heading to a store.

- It is also recommended to explore the self-service and online options – including interactive chat and customer forums - to interact with your service provider and get advice, rather than calling the customer service number. Providers' call centres are under higher than usual pressure at present and you may experience longer wait times.

- Another issue has been the imposition of major COVID-19 lock-downs in some offshore countries, including places that provide IT and/or customer service and technical support for Australian service providers. In some cases, this has disrupted the migration of some Australian services – i.e. when a customer is moving their service from one provider to a different provider. These issues are being addressed by the industry as a matter of the highest priority.

Support is available for customers:

- Many providers are offering free additional or unlimited data or other features in this crisis. This is helpful for people who find themselves working from home.

- Providers have Financial Hardship assistance available, and many are offering additional help such as temporarily waiving late payment fees.

- Check your provider's website to see what's available and how to access it. And again, try to use self-help tools as much as possible.

Tips for customers:

- If you are experiencing congestion or other issues and your call is not urgent, consider if you can wait and try again later.

- If you have difficulty making a voice call via a mobile network and you have access to Wi-Fi calling, try that to see if it works better for you.

- If you are working from home, make sure you follow your employer's advice about the best ways to connect to your company's network. Your employer will know the most effective paths and applications for you to use to connect and enjoy a hassle-free experience.

- When you are scheduling audio/video group calls, choose a start time that is 10, 20, 40 or 50 minutes past the hour, to ease dial-in congestion.

- Consider recommending audio-only options, to reduce the data volume of a group call/meeting.

- Avoid downloading/uploading large files (including movies) during peak times, which now also include daytime hours. For example, it can make a big difference if you can plan ahead and download a movie or other large file between 9pm and 9am.

- If you have a choice of image quality, choose standard definition over HD or 4k.

- Before trying to contact your provider by phone, please try accessing online self-help tools where possible.

- And last but not least – try to be patient. Telcos and their staff are doing their very best in these difficult times.

- **AIIA has some excellent resources for businesses** managing employees working from home: https://www.australianbusinesscontinuity.com.au/aiia

- **Parents are encouraged** to check school or education department websites for tips on accessing online learning resources.

- If you require information in relation to COVID-19, please call the National Hotline on 1800 020 080. If you require emergency assistance from police, fire or ambulance, please call 000.