



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

MEDIA RELEASE

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Improved mobile coverage for regions: Mobile Black Spot Program funds 182 new base stations with more than 800 base stations now live

More Australians living in regional and remote Australia will benefit from new and improved mobile coverage under Round 5 of the Morrison McCormack Government's highly successful \$380 million Mobile Black Spot Program.

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 announced 182 new base stations will be delivered under Round 5, providing improved mobile coverage for regional and remote communities.

Minister Fletcher said, "The announcement of successful Round 5 locations today brings the total number of base stations being funded under the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program to 1,229, underlining our ongoing commitment to providing new and improved mobile connectivity to Australians across the country."

"Improved mobile connectivity makes it possible for Australians to stay connected, access education services, conduct business and remain in contact with family and friends. These activities are critical year-round, but particularly important with people responding to the COVID-19 crisis and spending more time at home," said Minister Fletcher.

Minister Coulton said, "Our Mobile Black Spot program is connecting regional communities and businesses, enabling them to contribute more effectively to our local, regional and national economies."

More than \$836 million is being invested in new mobile infrastructure in regional and remote Australia across the five rounds.

"This very significant investment is allowing much needed mobile services to be delivered in areas where they would otherwise not be commercially viable, with regional, rural and remote Australians being the real winners here," said Minister Coulton.

The Federal Government is contributing \$34 million to Round 5 of the Program, which will deliver total new investment of more than \$73 million together with co-contributions from the funding recipients and state governments.

This comes as the Mobile Black Spot Program passes a significant milestone with more than 800 mobile base stations now on air across Australia, meaning more coverage in more rural areas.

“More than 77 per cent of the 1047 base stations funded through the first four rounds of the Program are now complete taking us past the 800 mobile base station milestone. I thank Telstra, Optus and Vodafone for their work in getting us to this point, and importantly for their ongoing commitment to the Program,” Minister Fletcher said.

The Government has allocated funding for all Round 5 proposals that offer value for money to taxpayers and meet the guidelines for the round. Of the \$80 million made available, \$34 million has been successfully allocated.

Funding for new Round 5A

The Government intends that the next step in the Mobile Black Spot program will be to conduct a Round 5A, which will be used to test a range of different program designs. Funding for round 5A will be drawn from the unused portion of the funding allocated to Round 5.

The existing program design has served Australia very well. However, with each successive round, the base stations being funded are less economic for the mobile network operators. This fact, and the results from Round 5, suggest that fewer sites are likely to be successfully funded if future rounds are held under the existing program design.

The discussion paper to consult on the different program designs which could be tested under the future Round 5A has been released today.

The paper proposes three main objectives for this round:

- to improve mobile connectivity along major transport corridors;
- to improve mobile connectivity in disaster-prone regions; and
- to test new technologies that support shared mobile coverage in regional areas.

A decision on the timing of Round 5A will be taken once responses to the discussion paper have been received and considered.

Round 5 base stations are scheduled to roll out in the coming months with the first new base stations expected to be activated by the end of the year.

To view the full list of Round 5 locations visit, or to provide feedback on the discussion paper on the design of future rounds, visit: communications.gov.au/mbsp

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Additional information

State based releases for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania can be found on the Department website: <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/fletcher>

Quotes from industry

Nikos Katinakis, Telstra's Group Executive of Networks and IT, said, "In challenging times it is important people can remain as connected to each other as possible, whether that is through remote schooling, working from home or just staying socially connected through video calling and social media. We are proud that we have delivered hundreds of mobile base stations and invested \$280 million to deliver coverage to our most regional and remote customers."

Andrew Sheridan, Optus' Vice President of Regulatory and Public Affairs said, "Optus is a strong supporter of the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program, which is bringing coverage and competition to regional Australia, in many places for the first time. We congratulate the Government on reaching the huge milestone of 800 sites and look forward to working closely together in current and future rounds."

A spokesperson for Vodafone said, "We're pleased to be working as part of the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program to deliver new mobile sites for communities in regional and remote areas. To date, Vodafone has delivered approximately 36,700 square kilometres of new external coverage to our customers; extended 4G services to more than 16,000 additional homes; and added more than 1,450 kilometres of 4G connectivity along major transport routes across the country."

Andrew Roberts, CEO of Field Solutions Group, said, "Field Solutions has been delivering true broadband solutions for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia for the last four years. Now with the backing of the Federal Government mobile black spot program, we are proud to pioneer the delivery of our multi-use tower strategy ensuring the delivery of both true broadband and mobile phone coverage is achieved."