



THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts

SENATOR THE HON BRIDGET MCKENZIE

Minister for Emergency Management, National Recovery and Resilience
Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACCC to conduct public inquiry into regional mobile tower access

The Australian Government has directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to conduct a public inquiry into access to regional mobile towers and into the feasibility of providing mobile roaming during natural disasters or other emergencies.

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said the Government has had a longstanding policy of improving mobile coverage and competition in regional, rural, remote and peri-urban Australia. He said the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review had noted strong progress but highlighted issues that need to be further addressed.

“In that context, we want to make sure that the current settings for providing access to mobile towers are fit-for-purpose,” Minister Fletcher said.

“The ACCC will call for submissions from a range of parties, including the organisations that provide towers and associated infrastructure, and the organisations that use the towers to provide services to Australians.

“A factor that increases the need for this review is that in the last year both Telstra and Optus have sold part ownership of their tower networks to third parties. It is important to consider the impact of this change in ownership on the incentives of the tower ownership businesses when it comes to providing access to their towers and the charges levied for that access.”

The inquiry will look at the costs of providing towers and associated infrastructure, including land access, and how these translate into the fee structures for firms interested in accessing towers to provide mobile and other wireless services. It will also look at the factors that are important for industry in deciding whether to invest in towers and provide better mobile coverage.

Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, said the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review had recommended that the Government examine the feasibility of providing mobile roaming during natural disasters and other emergencies.

“The inquiry will be specifically about whether roaming can be activated in an area where there is a disaster or other emergencies, regardless of which telco people may be using during the time of the crisis.

“This could help our regional communities stay safe, stay connected to business and to loved ones during natural disasters and other emergencies.

“The ACCC will consider the technical feasibility of providing roaming during these circumstances, as well as the business systems and processes that would be required, and the time and cost involved,” Minister McKenzie said.

The ACCC is to commence the inquiry by 1 July 2022 and must report within 12 months. The ACCC will publish a draft report and seek submissions on that report before providing its final report to the Minister.

The direction and explanatory statement can be found at <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2022L00439>

To view the report of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review and the Government’s full response, visit www.rtirc.gov.au

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