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SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY  
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY  
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

The Hon John Murphy MP  
Chair  
The House Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House, PO Box 6021  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

05 JUL 2011

Dear Chair

**Petition regarding decommissioning the analog television facilities in Wandoan**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the petition from residents of Wandoan, Queensland, regarding the decommissioning of the analog television re-transmission facilities at Nathan Road, Wandoan.

The Australian Government understands the importance of free-to-air television for Australians living in regional and rural areas and has funded the new digital television service known as Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST). VAST will provide the same number of channels available to viewers in metropolitan areas.

VAST will feature 17 channels, including ABC1, ABC2, ABC3, ABCNews24, SBS ONE, SBS TWO, SBS HD, Southern Cross television (7), 7TWO, 7mate, Imparja, GO!, Gem, Ten Central, One, Eleven. The VAST service will also provide viewers with access to the local regional news services. These services will be provided through a dedicated news channel.

Households who currently rely on an analog 'self-help' facility that is not converted to digital by commercial broadcasters and who are not able to receive an adequate digital signal from another transmitter serving their area, are able to receive their digital television services through the new VAST service.

In addition to this, the government has introduced a Satellite Subsidy Scheme that provides assistance to these households in regional and remote areas to move to the VAST satellite service. This is the case with the households currently dependent on the re-transmission facility at Wandoan.

The government is providing a subsidy of \$400 per household in defined 'standard' areas, \$550 in defined 'very remote' areas and \$700 in defined 'far north tropical' areas across Australia. Cabinet agreed to these three tiers of subsidy, as they reflect the difference per household's average costs likely to be incurred, depending on where the household is located. This will result in one flat co-payment across all of Queensland. Households in Wandoan may be eligible for a \$400 subsidy. The subsidy can be accessed by using the Government contracted installer and not by cash or reimbursement.

After the subsidy, eligible households in regional and remote Queensland will pay \$220. This is a one-off cost, paid directly to the installer, and there are no ongoing fees to receive the VAST satellite service.

The co-payment per household is also able to be kept to these low levels through the economies of scale involved in delivering to all eligible households in a switchover region.

As noted in the terms of the petition submitted to the Standing Committee, the scheme will pay for the conversion of one television set per household to the VAST service. People with more than one television who move to the VAST service will have to put in additional cabling and set-top boxes at their own expense, although the same dish can be used for a number of televisions. This is not substantially different from what people with more than one television in metropolitan and regional areas throughout Australia who receive their television services terrestrially will have to do to receive digital television.

To assist the households in Wandoan to set-up VAST on a number of televisions, the contracts in Queensland will make it possible for households to elect to pay an additional sum directly to the contractor to convert additional televisions. This will assist householders to save on any additional call-out fees. The price of these additional services has been approved by the government.

Thank you for bringing the concerns of the residents of the Wandoan District to my attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Conroy  
Minister for Broadband,  
Communications and the Digital Economy