

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 14

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 47, 24/05/2017

Topic: USO footprint

Senator Chisholm, Anthony asked:

Senator CHISHOLM: In terms of the primary USO footprint, where is it not commercial to provide voice services and how much of the NBN rollout is complete in those areas?

Mr Robinson: You have asked a very hard question. An indirect element of the USO arrangements is the so-called continuity obligation, and that is that Telstra will provide copper based services for the last seven per cent, which is broadly a fixed wireless and satellite footprint. That is part of the obligation. Arguably some other parts of their network are possibly non-commercial as well.

You have asked about voice services. As the Productivity Commission included in their draft report, voice services are available on NBN fixed wireless services. They are available, of course, on mobile services, which cover a large part of the country. There is discussion about how adequate a voice service is on satellite. Generally there are concerns that NBN satellite voice services, to the extent they are available, actually are not an adequate service. The satellite was not designed for that. What I am trying to say is there are patches of coverage of various types of technologies and services, and all of that would need to be assessed and provided for in any arrangement to change USO obligations.

Senator CHISHOLM: It obviously was a detailed question. Can you provide any further information on that on notice?

Mr Robinson: Certainly.

Answer:

- i. Section 9 of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999*, states that, under the USO, standard telephone services are “*reasonably accessible to all people in Australia, on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business.*” Accordingly, the provision is Australia-wide although this is not to say that these are all non-commercial areas. For most of the Australian population it is clear that there are commercial/competitive services available.
- ii. With respect to National Broadband Network rollout outside fixed line areas, as at 22 June 2017, services could be ordered by 509,355 of the over 600,000 premises to be covered by NBN Co Limited’s (nbn’s) fixed wireless footprint. In nbn’s satellite footprint, services have been available to order since April 2016 for the approximately 400,000 premises being served by this technology.