



Low Earth Orbit Satellite Working Group Secretariat

Via: LEOworkinggroup@communications.gov.au

Dear secretariat

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (Advisory Group) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Satellite Systems and Australia's Telecommunications Regulatory Framework discussion paper (discussion paper). We would also like to note our appreciation for the interest of your team and the Working Group in issues relating to First Nations digital inclusion.

With the increasing deployment of Low Earth Orbiting Satellites (LEOSats), the Advisory Group is keenly interested to see how this technology can address the current levels of poor connectivity experienced by many First Nations communities where traditional communication infrastructure is not a viable option. However, as the LEOSats market matures and expands further, we need to make sure that First Nations consumers are not left behind and are effectively supported to take up this technology.

In response to the discussion paper, our submission is focused on three key themes:

- **consumer protection:** ensuring appropriate consumer protections are in place throughout the entire delivery chain from devices, quality of service, clear billing and responsive repairs.
- **digital ability, connectivity literacy and local support:** ensuring First Nations consumers are supported throughout the deployment of LEOSat connectivity will help prevent unintended harms such as scams and ensure local community-wide benefit.
- **cultural awareness and a place-based approach:** ensuring industry and government are mindful of the cultural sensitivities and needs of First Nations people and communities, and tailor their approach accordingly.

Further detail on the above issues is provided in the **appendix** of this letter. Please contact our secretariat (FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au) should you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dot West".

Ms Dot West OAM
Co-chair
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyndon Ormond Parker".

Associate Professor Lyndon Ormond Parker
Co-chair
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group



APPENDIX

Consumer protection

We recommend that consumer protection should be part of the LEOSats regulatory framework throughout the entire delivery cycle. This includes mobile devices, quality connection standards, encryption and privacy by default, clear billing, responsive repairs and accessible avenues for assistance.

Leaving these issues to the market, without sufficient regulation and safeguards, may mean that digitally excluded cohorts, including First Nations Australians, are further left behind in our digital economy and society. For example, telecommunications companies upselling services and devices to First Nations Australians, leading to affordability issues and creating a lack of trust for many.

When it comes to consumer protection, the Advisory Group notes that this could fall under many different regulations and standards from devices, billing, online safety, data protection/privacy, quality of service, spectrum and emergency services. This could lead to potential areas where First Nations consumers are left without appropriate protection.

The recent shutdown of 3G coverage has demonstrated the interplay and reliance between connectivity and devices such as mobile phones, EFTPOS machines and medical alarms, as well as the impacts on First Nations communities and other vulnerable Australians who may continue to be unaware as website announcements and automated SMS/e-mails may not reach the intended audience.

The shutdown also demonstrated a challenge with the current universal service arrangements, as they do not include mobile coverage despite 63 per cent of Australians in 2022 having only a mobile for phone (voice) calls at home with no landline¹. Furthermore, 75 per cent of remote First Nations people surveyed in the Mapping the Digital Gap project are mobile only users².

With the introduction of more Direct to Device (D2D) capabilities we need to ensure the lessons from the 3G shutdown are incorporated more broadly. For example, devices that utilise LEOSats as a primary form of connection can fall back to more “traditional” methods as a standard or vice versa. These devices can fall outside the international mobile phone device standards, such as medical or financial devices, and need to be examined in broader regulations.

Strong consumer protections will also benefit the LEOSats industry as it will help demonstrate that LEOSats are a feasible and effective solution to connectivity, both for individuals and for communities. This could provide the reassurance for government to open up opportunities to allow LEOSats to be a wider part of the Emergency Call Service system and temporary usage during disasters where other telecommunications infrastructure is damaged or awaiting repair.

In addition to this, there is an opportunity for LEOSats to be part of the delivery of quality service under an updated universal service framework, so that all communities have access to at least some connectivity. With the emergence of direct to device handsets in coming years, this would be a critical way to lift digital inclusion for even the most remote communities. For this opportunity to be realised, however, we need to consider ensuring LEOSat services are available on a prepaid basis. We know First Nations Australians rely on prepaid mobile, for example, and not having this as an option for LEOSats will undermine their take-up in our communities.

¹ [How Australians make voice calls at home | ACMA](#)

² [Mapping the Digital Gap 2023 Outcomes Report](#)



Digital ability, connectivity literacy and local support

Although the discussion paper focuses on the regulatory and technical aspects of LEOSat connectivity, the Advisory Group wishes to reemphasise the need to support First Nations consumers and other digitally excluded Australians on other aspects of digital inclusion which include digital ability and connectivity literacy.

Digital ability refers to a user's confidence and skills to engage in a range of online activities safely and securely. Without improving digital ability, users are unable to take advantage of online services and opportunities, and become susceptible to online harm and scams. Connectivity literacy refers to a user's understanding of their connectivity options, such as ensuring they purchase an internet plan that suits their needs. This prevents them from being sold expensive plans or devices that are financially unsuitable. We acknowledge that these issues are not the sole responsibility of LEOSat providers and recognise the role that both government and the telecommunication industry play in ensuring customers are supported in both getting connected and having a fulfilling online experience.

A final aspect is ensuring local support is provided. Although this might normally mean frontline staff who can provide face to face assistance and guidance, it could also mean Australian-based call centres. We have seen the success from First Nations call centres in Cherbourg and Palm Island not only in assisting customers but also in providing valuable digital skills and work experience for employees. With the underlying LEOSat infrastructure often owned by overseas entities, there is a need to ensure that Internet Service Providers not based in Australia still provide local support beyond just online forms or FAQs.

Cultural awareness

Cultural awareness is critical in ensuring a holistic, place-based solution which is not just focused on the technical aspects of connectivity. For example, as more satellites are launched into the sky, they can scatter and disrupt the sun's light, disrupting First Nations astronomy and kinship with the environment. For this reason, First Nations communities may be reluctant to rely on technology that actively disrupts their cultural heritage. This shows that government and industry need to be sensitive and flexible when providing connectivity solutions.

In line with cultural awareness, the Advisory Group also believes that providing information and support in First Nations languages is critical. Further, this information should be shared through a targeted communication campaign which draws on the engagement and reach of the First Nations media and broadcasting sector; and as previously mentioned, First Nations call centres when providing awareness on what connectivity options First Nations communities have, their rights as a consumer and who they can contact.