



22 May 2026

Universal Services Branch

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Dear Universal Services Branch

Submission to Consultation on Extending Rules about Requests for USO Voice Services

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Department's draft *Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation (Standard Telephone Service – Requirements and Circumstances) Amendment Determination 2026 (Amendment Determination)* and its accompanying Explanatory Statement. The Amendment Determination will extend the existing *Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation (Standard Telephone Service – Requirements and Circumstances) Determination 2023 (USO Determination)* (currently due to sunset on 1 July 2026), with minor amendments.

Our office continues to support the Universal Service Obligation (**USO**) as a vital component of Australia's universal services framework.¹ While mobile and fixed broadband services are increasingly the primary telecommunications services most Australians rely on in their everyday lives, complaints to our office show that fixed voice services remain critically important to some consumers. Fixed voice services are particularly important when other forms of communication are unreliable or unavailable (for example where a consumer's home receives no mobile coverage).

We welcome the Amendment Determination, which will extend the existing rules relating to applications for Standard Telephone Services (**STSSs**) under the USO, in line with the current sunset date for the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2023*.²

One proposed amendment will require the USO provider to give the requesting person clear written information before refusing to supply an STS on the ground that they have not made a suitable electricity supply available for the service. This information must explain the steps the person must take to provide electricity and what the relevant technical requirements are. We support this change as it should help to clarify for consumers what is required for them to obtain an STS.

However, we are aware some stakeholders are concerned that the ongoing requirement for requesting persons to provide electricity excludes some consumers living off-grid or in rural

¹ As set out in our [September 2025 Universal Services Policy Position Statement](#), we support a universal services framework that includes (at a minimum) voice and broadband services at Australians' homes and places of business.

² The Minister has recently directed the ACMA to extend the sunset date for the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2023* until 31 August 2029. The effect of item 9 of the Amendment Determination is that the USO Determination will also be extended until 31 August 2029 as part of this change.

or remote areas, some of whom are consumers experiencing vulnerability. We encourage the Department to account for these consumers' needs in future considerations of the universal services framework. We understand that telcos are not responsible for supplying electricity, and that electricity at a consumer's premises is a technical requirement of most modern voice technologies. Ultimately, this problem may require a holistic solution that involves the USO provider, electricity distribution businesses, and government.

We look forward to learning the outcome of this consultation process, and contributing to future consultation about the development of Australia's universal services framework.

Yours sincerely,

Cynthia Gebert

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman