

29 June 2018



Secretariat  
Review of the Viewer Access  
Satellite Television  
Department of Communications and the Arts  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear xx

**Re: Review of the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST)**

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is the peak national body representing farmers and, more broadly, agriculture across Australia. It is one of Australia's foremost and respected advocacy organisations.

Since its inception in 1979, the NFF has earned a reputation as a leader in the identification, development and achievement of policy outcomes that champion issues affecting farmers, and is dedicated to the advancement of agriculture.

Although difficult to quantify, the NFF asserts that a significant number of its members are beneficiaries of the VAST program. In many instances it is the only source of television coverage members are able to receive.

The NFF considers the provision of television services, both from national public broadcasters and commercial providers, are essential for the general liveability and wellbeing of rural, regional and remote Australians. The NFF considers it appropriate that the Australian Government funds the services given commercial viability and alternate delivery mechanisms are not possible in the areas serviced by VAST.

It is understood the television services provided also include educational viewing and provide essential connectivity across the Australian Community.

It is true that the dynamics of television consumption is evolving – particularly as we become more connected to internet services. It also true that more and more rural, regional and remote Australian access internet services as the National Broadband Network's (NBN) fixed wireless and satellite services roll out. However, while these services are beneficial, they do not yet have the data capacity, accessibility and reliability to be considered a viable alternative to satellite television services. Many NFF members report significant capacity constraints with their existing services even when undertaking what would be broadly be considered day-to-

day usage (emails, banking, etc.), and utilising technology to provide 'smart tv' is not an option for most.

For those relying on NBN satellite internet Skymuster, the data allowances, internet speed and reliability are not currently sufficient to replace the free to air television viewing provided by VAST. Many households would also find it a challenge to 'connect' their homes on an extensive WIFI system required for internet television services.

The NFF also notes that the VAST consumers may not experience the range of content offered to non-satellite television consumers and may be viewing content not relevant to their region. We support the notion that as much as possible a variety of content and regional relevance should be provided through this service, and therefore support VAST funding enabling commercial content in addition to the national public broadcasters.

Overall the NFF considers the VAST program plays a positive role for regional Australians and the agricultural sector, and supports the continuation of Australian Government funding. In making this recommendation we do recognise that technology is evolving rapidly and it would be appropriate for the VAST satellite service to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it can similarly evolve. On the face of it, five years seems a reasonable timeframe for review, but we acknowledge that commercial negotiations may necessitate a different timeframe.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission and consider our members who rely on this critical service. Should you wish to discuss further please do not hesitate to contact Mr Mark Harvey-Sutton, General Manager for Rural Affairs at [mharveysutton@nff.org.au](mailto:mharveysutton@nff.org.au) or on 02 6269 5666.

Yours sincerely



**TONY MAHAR**  
**Chief Executive Officer**