



Police Federation of Australia

The National Voice of Policing

***SUBMISSION to the
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE
on COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS***

via - communications.reps@aph.gov.au

9 November 2022

***INQUIRY INTO EXPERIENCE, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR
CO-INVESTMENT IN MULTI-CARRIER REGIONAL MOBILE INFRASTRUCTURE***

The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) is the national body representing the professional and industrial interests of Australia's more than 66,000 police officers, across all state, territory, and the federal police jurisdictions.

Membership as at: 31 December 2021	
Police Association of South Australia	4,774
Western Australia Police Union of Workers	7,100
Queensland Police Union of Employees	12,190
The Police Association (Victoria)	17,791
Police Association of NSW	17,174
Police Association of Tasmania	1,419
Northern Territory Police Association	1,616
Australian Federal Police Association	3,965
Police Federation of Australia	66,029

It could be safely argued that there has not been an inquest or inquiry held in recent times where communications, within and between agencies, has not been raised as an issue of concern. This is particularly the case in regional, rural, and remote parts of Australia.

Communications are a critical operational component for police and other emergency services, particularly during natural disasters such as fires, floods, and other major weather events. Loss of contact can be the difference between life and death in many incidents.

The ability to maintain contact between front line operations, supervisors and command centres is crucial in any operation. It ensures that –

- Front line officers' and the community's safety is paramount, and they need to know that help will be available if called upon;
- Operations remain appropriately coordinated; and
- Relevant information about an incident is able to be shared between the front line and the command centre thus ensuring that all potential risks are mitigated.

All previous reviews into major disasters and other critical incidents have shown the importance of communications in the overall effectiveness of the emergency services response, again, particularly in regional, rural, and remote locations. All have highlighted similar issues, including:

- Blackspots for voice and other telecommunications;
- Slow data speed;
- Outages;
- Damage to communication infrastructure;
- Lack of interoperability between agencies; and
- The inadequacy of spectrum allocations for the data communication needs of emergency services.

Much has been written and spoken over a long period of time about blackspots and communications inefficiencies for residents in regional, rural, and remote Australia, but such failures are magnified when emergency services are dealing with critical and potentially life-threatening incidents. What is even more concerning is many of these issues are ongoing and also experienced in areas that are close to major capital centres and not at all considered to be in remote terrain. The PFA argues that

any future government funding for blackspots should ensure that access to the network is available to everyone in that area, regardless of their telco carrier.

For all of the above reasons, the PFA supports the concept of multi-carrier regional mobile communications infrastructure, with built in safeguards to ensure that telecommunications companies do not cut back on their investment on regional mobile infrastructure or attempt to get a 'free ride' from other telco or government investments.

We are aware of the submission to this Inquiry by the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety at the University for Melbourne, with whom the PFA has worked closely over a number of years on like issues and support its contents. That submission makes a number of relevant points, including the identification of what should be considered the key components of a mission critical communications eco system for public safety.

We are also aware of a range of other activities and inquiries currently taking place in this space. Of particular importance to the PFA and the wider public safety community, is the Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) Proof of Concept being led by the NSW Telco Authority. The concept of a national PSMB capability has been debated for many years and as a result of a recommendation from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, is finally being pursued. It is important that this Committee acknowledge that recommendation and the other work and inquiries currently being undertaken and ensure that the outcome of this Committee compliments those other activities occurring in this space.

I would be happy to appear before the Committee to expand on any aspects of this submission.

Sincerely yours



Scott Weber APM
Chief Executive Officer