



Terms of Reference for a review of the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service

Terms of Reference

The VAST service provides satellite delivery of free-to-air (FTA) television services to approximately 30,000 travellers (e.g. caravanners) and 200,000 households, mainly in regional and remote Australia, who are unable to receive reliable local terrestrial FTA transmission. The main contracts managing the service expire on 30 June 2020.

Since VAST was introduced in 2010, the media and communications sectors have changed considerably. It is therefore prudent to review the current VAST arrangements so Government can consider whether these represent the most efficient and effective way in the future to provide FTA TV to viewers unable to receive reliable terrestrial television transmission. The Department of Communications and the Arts will review the VAST program to advise the Minister for Regional Communications on:

- the effectiveness and efficiency of the current FTA TV services via VAST, and
- options relating to the delivery of FTA TV services in areas that do not receive a reliable local terrestrial FTA transmission.

The Review is expected to be complete by August 2018.

Background

The converging communications and media environments have changed dramatically since VAST was first introduced. Digital television and the internet has enabled a greater array of television and other media content, including other TV services. These, and recent media law reform regarding broadcast licencing means there has been considerable change in the television landscape since VAST commenced in 2010.

At the time, the VAST satellite service addressed a longstanding issue, particularly in remote and regional Australia, where many people received no or limited access to television services. When it commenced in 2010, the VAST service allowed all Australians to receive the same range of FTA television services as those available in metropolitan areas. The service also provides viewers with access to regional commercial news bulletins via a dedicated local news channel.

The Australian Government has provided \$117 million in funding to the commercial broadcasters to deliver their services on VAST over ten years. The Government also provides funding to the ABC and SBS for VAST as part of their annual appropriations. Optus was contracted by all broadcasters to provide these services.

Australian Government funding provided to the remote commercial broadcasters to deliver the VAST service was designed to enable the broadcast of a greater range of commercial FTA channels than would otherwise be economically viable.

