



Federal government pledging to include voice and SMS services in the USO upon re-election

## Description

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Responding to widespread calls for action, the Federal government is pledging to include voice and SMS services in the USO (Universal Service Obligation) upon re-election. The USO currently only consists of guarantee for broadband internet through the NBN, and landline and payphone telephone access.

The universal outdoor mobile obligation would use low-orbit satellites to deliver voice and SMS services to areas of the country not connected to the land-based 4G and 5G network. This would add to the longstanding policy of the USO ensuring all Australians have access to some level of communication technology.

“The Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation will improve public safety, increase resilience during natural disasters, and provide an extra layer of coverage in areas previously thought too difficult or costly to reach,” Communications minister Michelle Rowland said in a statement.

## How it would work

This capability currently only exists with satellite-enabled phones. Ms Rowland said a re-elected Labor government would partner with the University of Technology Sydney to expand mobile compatibility testing.

Companies like StarLink, Link Global, AST SpaceMobile and Vodafone Global have been rapidly establishing fleets of low earth orbit satellites. By employing “Direct 2 Device” (also known as Direct to Handset) technology, telecommunications systems can transmit signals to many recently released smartphones.

The Federal Government’s policy would require partnerships between Australian telecommunications companies and satellite providers to ensure basic voice calls and SMS could



be made in areas of the country where phones get no reception at all.

Once operational, it would improve access to emergency calls, basic coverage in existing black spots, and better mobile access in the wake of natural disasters.

Examples of how this has worked in other areas:

- United States telecommunications company T-Mobile in partnership with SpaceX used this technology to provide voice calls and SMS services in the wake of the Los Angeles fires.
- T-Mobile launched 477 satellites through SpaceX in a bid to provide coverage to around 129.5 million hectares (500,000 square miles) of the USA not covered by any wireless phone provider.

This technology is different to the satellite SOS provided by companies like Apple, which only provides access to emergency calls when a triple-0 call has failed to connect to a mobile tower.

The policy will not replace existing plans such as the Mobile Black Spot Program and Mobile Network Hardening Program, which Ms Rowland said will continue under a re-elected Labor government.

## More Information

Find out more through the Federal Government's [media release](#), and this [ABC news article](#). Visit our website to learn more about [direct to handset technology](#), the [different satellite technologies](#), and the [USO](#).

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