



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

Submission to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

In response to the Inquiry into the deployment, adoption and
application of 5G in Australia

1 November 2019

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) welcomes the opportunity to make comments on the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts into the deployment, adoption and application of 5G in Australia.

ALGA is the voice of local government in Australia, representing around 537 councils across the nation. ALGA's President represents local government as a member of the Council of Australian Governments and several other ministerial councils. In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. This submission should be read in conjunction with any separate submissions received from state and territory associations as well as individual councils.

Comments

There is no doubt that 5G is a quantum leap in technology. The Commonwealth Government's Smart Cities Plan is a vision to maximise the potential of cities by embracing new technology to revolutionise how cities and regional centres are planned, function and to grow Australia's economy. The advent of 5G will utilise technology advancements to exponentially increase the amount of software and applications available to all levels of government and communities to feed into the Internet of Things.

While Australians support the rollout of modern infrastructure, there have been concerns raised by communities, individuals and councils over the safety of 5G, and also about the proliferation of telecommunications infrastructure, including being located on council owned infrastructure. Local government has in the past expressed concerns about the rollout of telecommunications equipment, and restates its position that the rollout of 5G should not override important planning, heritage, consultation and safety assessment provisions.

Although there has been much hype over what the rollout of 5G and the Internet of Things will bring, there seems limited understanding in the community of exactly what 5G will deliver and detail of how it will work. This situation has given rise to uncertainties about 5G including health concerns over the higher frequency emissions under which 5G will operate. A number of councils in Australia have expressed concerns over the health risks of electromagnetic radiation of 5G. A number of overseas cities have taken similar action to stop the rollout of 5G.

The proliferation of 5G and other telecommunications infrastructure has also been an issue of concern to a number of councils. This proliferation includes attaching increasing numbers of telecommunications structures to local and state government and privately held infrastructure. While ALGA supports the rollout of modern telecommunications infrastructure to improve the lifestyles, environment and economy of cities and towns, it needs to be balanced with proper process to ensure structural integrity, safety, urban design, visual amenity is retained and visual interference (eg. along road corridors) is minimised. Local government planning legislation and community consultation exist for a reason – to ensure that facilities and infrastructure meet certain standards and safety requirements.

ALGA also restates its long-held position that telecommunications should be delivered equitably to all Australians no matter where they live. Currently there are regional areas which still lack access to reliable connectivity, and which pay a higher cost for services compared to their metropolitan counterparts. The issue of black spots still affects regional, rural and remote areas of Australia and can negatively impact on individuals' and communities' access to emergency and health services, social

connections and the increasing number of online government services. These communities are likely to continue to be disadvantaged under 5G.

ALGA encourages the Commonwealth Government to lead the agenda on the 5G rollout, rather than leave the rollout to be driven by commercial interests. Commercial interest needs to be balanced with planning laws which are designed to protect public safety, limit the impacts on the environment and also to ensure the community has a say in the planning process.

ALGA is aware that the Department of Communications and the Arts has engaged the Australian Council of Learned Academics (ACOLA) to consult stakeholders and develop a report on the Internet of Things over the next 12 months. The project will examine social, cultural, legal, ethical, economic and environmental implications of deployment of IoT in Australia. It will present an evidence base to support government decision making and help to ensure the safe and responsible implementation of this transformative technology.

ALGA encourages the Commonwealth Government to undertake a similar process in relation to 5G.

Recommendation

ALGA recommends that the Commonwealth develop and release an issues paper which provides a framework to underpin the rollout of 5G. The issues paper could include:

- a policy framework which would guide the rollout of 5G;
- a review of international models which have been successfully rolled out;
- a comprehensive explanation of the facts of 5G - to demonstrate what 5G will mean to organisations and individuals in real terms (eg. driverless vehicles, traffic congestion) and the infrastructure which will be needed to enable this to occur (eg. lenses and sensors etc);
- a researched position on the safety concerns being raised by Australians and overseas countries; and
- a timetable for a structured way forward.

The issues paper would improve understanding and stimulate debate on the issues which are currently not well understood, despite 5G being mooted for at least 3 years.



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