Contribution to GSR-21

Question 1 - Inducing new, effective and agile financing mechanisms to digital infrastructure, access and use

Supporting digital infrastructure and services, access and use requires regulators and policy makers to find an appropriate balance between facilitative actions to enable a thriving digital environment, while ensuring enduring social policy objectives are met. An enabling environment is needed to facilitate investment in digital infrastructure including an adaptive fit-for-purpose regulatory ecosystem along with open and competitive markets. Both the Australian Government and private industry are making significant investments to upgrade our digital infrastructure and to promote ubiquitous access. This includes delivery of the National Broadband Network which aims to replace aging digital infrastructure with optical fibre and other technologies to deliver more reliable, high-capacity internet to homes and businesses.

The Australian Government has also committed $380 million to the Mobile Black Spot Program to invest in telecommunications infrastructure to improve mobile coverage and competition across Australia. The Program is supported by co-contributions from state and local governments, mobile network operators, businesses and local communities. To date, this program has generated investment of more than $836 million, delivering more than 1,200 new base stations across Australia.

In May 2020, the Australian Government took steps to increase the resilience of the telecommunications network by investing in the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disaster package. This package allows telcos to invest in digital infrastructure to prevent telecommunications outages during disaster events and improve temporary communication structure capabilities at fire depots and evacuation centres.

On 29 September 2020, the Australian Government announced the Digital Business Plan. The Digital Business Plan provides significant backing to build the digital momentum, which accelerated strongly as a result of COVID-19 and expanded opportunities for businesses to grow and create more jobs. The Digital Business Plan aims to remove outdated regulatory barriers, boost capability of small business and support the continued uptake of technology across the economy. Another part of the Digital Business Plan is the Australian 5G Initiative; a grants program to help small to large businesses in Australia test and develop 5G uses, applications, services and products, including IoT applications. The 5G initiative will help showcase the productivity boosting applications of this technology and will aim to encourage other businesses to better understand ways they can adopt 5G solutions.

Question 2 - Prototyping regulatory patterns for the post-Covid digital world

Regulating in the post-COVID digital world will require an agile, innovation enabling approach to regulation. New measures may be needed to enhance regulatory foresight, harness data to target interventions and to create space for regulators to experiment. The post-COVID regulatory world will need adaptive, fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks which are outcome focussed. Opportunities to leverage the role of the private sector should also be explored, along with reducing barriers to trade and cooperation.

Regulatory frameworks need to be fit-for-purpose and regularly reviewed to ensure they are continuing to meet public policy objectives in a rapidly changing digital environment. As an evidence informed regulator, the ACMA, through our research program, considers how current and future developments in the communications and media landscape will impact public interest outcomes and our regulatory role.

The Australian Government's Deregulation Taskforce aims to drive improvements in the design, administration and effectiveness of the stock of government regulation to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. The Taskforce will develop and recommend solutions to lower the costs of regulation while retaining the benefits, making it easier for businesses to invest, create jobs and grow the economy.

The ACMA has a strong focus on building our research and data analytics capabilities to inform regulatory decision making and identify emerging regulatory issues. Our research program covers industry, consumer and market research. The ACMA also monitors market developments to help us stay informed on changes occurring within the broader media and communications environment.

Through our emerging technologies research series, we have explored how new tools and techniques could enable more efficient and cost-effective regulatory processes for regulators and industry. In March 2021, we published research on RegTech which found advances in this technology could have application within the Australian media and communication sectors in areas such as compliance, reporting and risk management outcomes. In March 2021, we also published research on IoT and digital twins which identified a range of potential use cases for this technology in

the media and communications environment including how a digital twin could potentially support communications infrastructure monitoring and reporting. We plan to publish research over the coming months which will examine how natural language processing and blockchain could support regulatory practice.

Question 3 - Transformational leadership to unleash the power of emerging technologies and business models

As the pace of technological change continues to accelerate, traditional regulatory approaches are under increasing strain. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for agile, responsive regulatory action and leadership. Through the pandemic the ACMA recognised the challenges for the media and communications sectors and established an agile, multidisciplinary taskforce to respond to industry requests for regulatory forbearance. As our environment during the pandemic evolved, the ACMA continued to adapt and respond in response to these changes.

Regulating in a digital context recognises transboundary issues in the digital ecosystem and the need for greater cooperation between regulators and across different sectors. The ACMA, through our international engagement strategy, works closely with international regulators and participates in several international fora.

Through our work leading the scam technology project, the ACMA examined potential technological solutions that could disrupt and reduce the level and severity of scams being perpetrated over telecommunications networks. The ACMA collaborated with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) on the scam technology project to reduce harms associated with scam calls and we work closely with the Unsolicited Communications Enforcement Network (UCENET) to monitor international developments.

In addition, in March 2021, the ACMA entered into a MoU with the Australian Financial Crimes Exchange (AFCX). The MoU enables the exchange of relevant data and other information between the AFCX and the ACMA around unauthorised mobile number porting, which will help the ACMA deliver on our phone scam priority compliance work for 2020–21 and beyond.

The ACMA considers that collaborative, agile regulation, which is outcomes focussed, can effectively support cross border collaboration and coordination. Collaborative regulation can be accountable in its design and implementation by including regular and transparent engagement and building co-operative partnerships. The ACMA has adopted new and innovative ways of working such as overseeing the development of a voluntary code of practice by digital platforms to address online disinformation and news quality issues. In June 2020, we released a position paper which detailed what we thought the voluntary code should cover. The final code was published by DIGI in February 2021. The ACMA is currently assessing the measures committed to by digital platforms and will be reporting to government on whether a self-regulatory framework is appropriate for the future.