

# Community Participation Commitment

## For Retail service changes

May 2012

### Introduction

With over 4,400 postal outlets scattered nationwide, Australia Post operates the nation's largest physical Retail network. This network includes a combination of corporate outlets, Licensed Post Offices (LPOs), Franchised Post Offices and Community Postal Agencies.

As a government-owned business enterprise, Australia Post is required (under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989) to balance its commercial responsibilities with its community service obligations. The Act specifically states that Australia Post has a commercial obligation to manage the performance of all of its functions "in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice". This includes the commercial operation of our Retail network.

But the APC Act also requires Australia Post to balance this commercial obligation with its community service obligations (CSOs) to provide services that are "reasonably accessible to all people in Australia, wherever they reside or carry on business". The CSO performance standards require Australia Post to maintain at least 4,000 postal outlets, including 2,500 outlets in rural and remote areas of Australia.

The commercial reality is that Australia Post does, from time to time, need to make changes to our Retail network because of changing customer behaviour and demographics, or the shifting requirements of a particular local community.

The growth of the digital economy is also changing the very nature of how Australians communicate; how they access services; and how they do their shopping. As a result, there has been a marked decline in letter volumes and the number of customers visiting postal outlets over recent years. These changes in customer behaviour are making it increasingly challenging for Australia Post to maintain a commercially viable network of more than 4,000 postal outlets.

Nonetheless, Australia Post is committed to meeting all of our community service obligations. We will do this by offering new and innovative services, and by maintaining a dynamic Retail network that can be adapted to local customer and community needs.

This Community Participation Commitment explains our framework for engaging with the local community when planning changes to our retail network. It also explains how the community, and other key stakeholders (including customers, staff, unions and all levels of government), can participate in our change planning process.

## Our Commitment

As an important community service provider, we accept and understand that nearly all Australians are interested in changes we make to services in their local area. This is especially the case in some rural and remote areas, where the Australia Post outlet (often operated as an LPO) provides vital services and acts as a local community hub.

At Australia Post, we are committed to engaging with local communities – and being accountable to those communities – in relation to any changes we make to our Retail outlets.

Typical examples of Retail service changes that require community participation and consultation include:

- outlet relocation;
- outlet closure;
- a change in the operating hours of a Retail outlet; or,
- the conversion of a Retail outlet to provide a different level of service (i.e. from Corporate to LPO).

The commitment we make to the communities in which we operate is that we will:

- seek the views and concerns of our stakeholders in local communities;
- consider their needs and expectations when planning and implementing changes to our Retail network; and,
- ensure we are accountable and transparent about the change process and the decisions we make.

## Applying this Commitment

This Community Participation Commitment frames our overall approach to engaging with local communities on Retail outlet changes. We will always apply the approach outlined in this Commitment whenever we are making service changes at Corporate-owned outlets (i.e. outlets operated directly by Australia Post).

We will also endeavour to use this approach when there are local service changes at LPOs, Franchised Post Offices and Community Postal Agencies. However, because these types of outlets are operated in partnership with other entities, occasionally we won't be able to apply the commitments outlined in this document. (For instance, sometimes our business partner (the operator of the local postal outlet) may not give Australia Post enough notice of a service change to allow a six-week community consultation process.)

This Community Participation Commitment does not apply to internal changes that do not impact our stakeholders; changes made on a national or state-wide level; or where the community consultation process is impractical for reasons beyond Australia Post's control (e.g. flood, unexpected closure by a Licensee).

## Criteria considered for assessing changes to local services

Australia Post always considers the following criteria (among other factors) when changing the level and type of service provided to a particular community:

- Local customer numbers;
- Post Office Box numbers;
- The needs of local business customers;
- Catchment area coverage / proximity to nearest outlet;
- Property lease terms, and physical attributes such as parking and disability access;
- Staffing; and,
- Corporate Responsibility.

## Three standards of Community Participation

The extent of the community participation process will vary depending on the nature of the proposed change. Australia Post will determine the type of community participation required on a case-by-case basis and we will follow the three standards set out below.

### **Standard 1: Community information**

#### **Inform the community about a proposed change and Australia Post's plans**

This standard will apply in cases where a decision has been taken to make a minor change to the services we offer at a postal outlet.

Where there is a minor change to the operations of a local postal outlet – such as a change in opening hours or; relocation to a premises a short distance from the existing site; or a minor outlet conversion (e.g. from CPA to LPO) – we will issue appropriate stakeholder information bulletins that outline details of the proposed change.

As a minimum standard, all changes to the Retail network will be accompanied by this kind of community information program.

Australia Post will use public notices, communications to Post Office Box customers, staff bulletins and other announcements to inform the community about the local impact of proposed changes.

### **Standard 2: Community consultation**

#### **Offer the community the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed change**

This standard will apply where there is an operational need that requires a change to Australia Post's local retail operations. This may include a change to the way postal services are provided in a local area or an outlet conversion (e.g. from Corporate outlet to LPO).

In these circumstances, the local community will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed change, and Australia Post will consider all feedback received.

This community consultation process will commence at least six weeks prior to a proposed outlet change, and will be accompanied by a community information program. The local community will be given the opportunity to provide feedback via normal contact channels.

If deemed necessary, we will also publish advertisements, issue media releases, and/or meet with interested community members to explain the proposed change. We will offer members of the community the opportunity to register their interest and provide contact details, so that we can ensure they are informed about the implementation of the proposed change.

Australia Post will consider local stakeholder opinions and we will modify our plans wherever we are able to incorporate the community's feedback into planned changes. Feedback on how community input affected the planning process and the outcome of the decision-making process will be confirmed prior to implementation.

### **Standard 3: Community involvement**

#### **Work directly with the community at numerous points in the planning process**

This standard will apply in cases where Australia Post would like to make a significant change to a broad range of retail services and we have the ability to consider a wide range of options in the planning process.

On such occasions, Australia Post will work directly with the community during planning to ensure their input is understood; appropriate alternatives are developed; and feedback is given on how the community input was considered as part of the decision-making process.

Community consultation will commence at least six weeks prior to a change, and generally will include local customers, staff, unions and all levels of government. During this community consultation process, interested local stakeholders will be kept informed of Australia Post's plans and will be invited to contribute recommendations.

Australia Post will establish a community liaison committee that meets regularly to help prioritise the community's needs and issues – as well as evaluate concepts, alternatives and appropriate feedback.

Information regarding the change will be shared and stakeholder communication and feedback will continue throughout the process, as plans are developed and refined.

#### **More information**

Go to the Australia Post website, [auspost.com.au](http://auspost.com.au), and click on 'About Us' and then 'Corporate Responsibility'.