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ESOA Comments on EU Guide to High Speed Broadband Investment

28 February 2019

ESOA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the EU Guide to High Speed Broadband Investment (“the Guide”) ahead of its being updated. Our comments are as follows:

1. The present Guide refers to the availability of satellite broadband as a relevant technology for ensuring broadband connectivity across the Union. Specific knowledge is required however to efficiently procure satellite broadband and ensure it is not accidentally excluded in a procurement process. The criteria for procurement of satellite broadband are also different from those usually applied to other technologies. Therefore ESOA considers that the updated Guide should include more explicit information for public authorities to enable them to use satellite to deliver 100% connectivity. For example, detailed information on how to make use of voucher schemes is presently contained in an Annex, when it is sufficiently important and should in fact be included in the body of the Guide itself.
2. Satellite broadband is already available within the Union providing speeds up to 30 Mbps so meeting the DAE 2020 targets. Concrete investments have however gone into new systems that will come to market within the next couple of years that enable speeds as fast as 100 Mbps. This will be an important breakthrough in EU Member States’ ability to bring their citizens into the Gigabit Society no matter where they live. The Guide should therefore be vigilant in providing sufficient and appropriate information of satellite broadband to Member States.
3. Knowledge of how to procure satellite broadband for example in terms of fixing criteria or using voucher schemes typically exists at **national** level while access to EU funding remains a **local** activity. In order to ensure gaps in knowledge at the local level do not prevent the successful deployment of satellite broadband where it is most needed, Member States should be advised to address their white spots by aggregating demand at national level for example starting with publishing a call-off tender for the creation of a list of registered service providers in its Official Journal / Web Site and then following a process that allows local administration of a central (national) scheme. Aggregation of demand is particularly important for a satellite procurement as the overall number of connections to be made may be scattered across different regions with potentially few in each one but making a substantial difference to connectivity overall.

ESOA will be happy to provide more inputs for inclusion in the updated Guide and meanwhile refers to its White Papers: “Why Satellite Broadband” (available at <https://esoa.net/Resources/Why-Sat-Broadband-PDF-version-for-Web.pdf>) and “Satellite: Bringing Ubiquity and Resilience to the 5G Ecosystem (available at <https://esoa.net/cms-data/positions/NEW-2016-5G-infographic-FINAL.pdf>) which both provide a good overview of the role and benefits of satellite in enabling broadband across the European Union.