

High Level Session on 'ITU enabling the wireless ecosystem' WSIS Forum 2017, 12 June 2017, 16h30

H.E. Mr Ped Peter Shanel Agovaka, Minister for Communication and Aviation. Solomon Islands

SOLOMON ISLANDS Telecommunications Policy Statement

This policy expresses the intention of the Government of Solomon Islands to liberalize the telecommunication and ICT market to ensure competition and promote growth of the economy.

The Solomon Islands is an Archipelago of approximately 1000 islands with a total land mass of 28,400 square kilometres and sea area of 11,000 square miles. The country is divided into 9 provinces and total population as of 2015 is 642,000. The Solomon Islands is a former colony of the United Kingdom and obtained independence on 7th July 1978.

Geographical location, sparsely populated and long distances between the Islands and proximity to existing networks is a challenge in Solomon Islands. Cost of doing business is high and telecommunication costs remains high and penetration relatively low in early development.

Telecommunications in Solomon Islands was first regulated through the Telecommunications Act 1971. Further amendment to the same Act was made in 1978 and 1982. Early practices in Solomon Islands saw the government playing major roles in both regulation and policy development of telecommunication. Telecommunication service delivery and level of connectivity continues to be limited to only to the urban areas in the capital and provincial headquarters.

The only telecommunication service provider in Solomon Islands until 2009 is Solomon Telekom with an exclusive licence.

The issues with this approach results in:

- Restricted telecommunications market
- Mobile penetration in Solomon Islands is only 25% and fixed line penetration only 2%
- Poor connectivity
- Costly customers
- Constraints to economic growth

Change finally came in 2009 when the government repealed the Telecommunications Act 1971 and passed a new Telecommunication Act 2009. The reason for the new Act was to liberalise the telecommunication market in Solomon Islands.

Since 2009, an independent telecommunication regulator was established to issue licences, manage and monitor activities in the telecommunication sector. Complimentary to the

regulator, the communication policing role has been retained with the Minister for Communication.

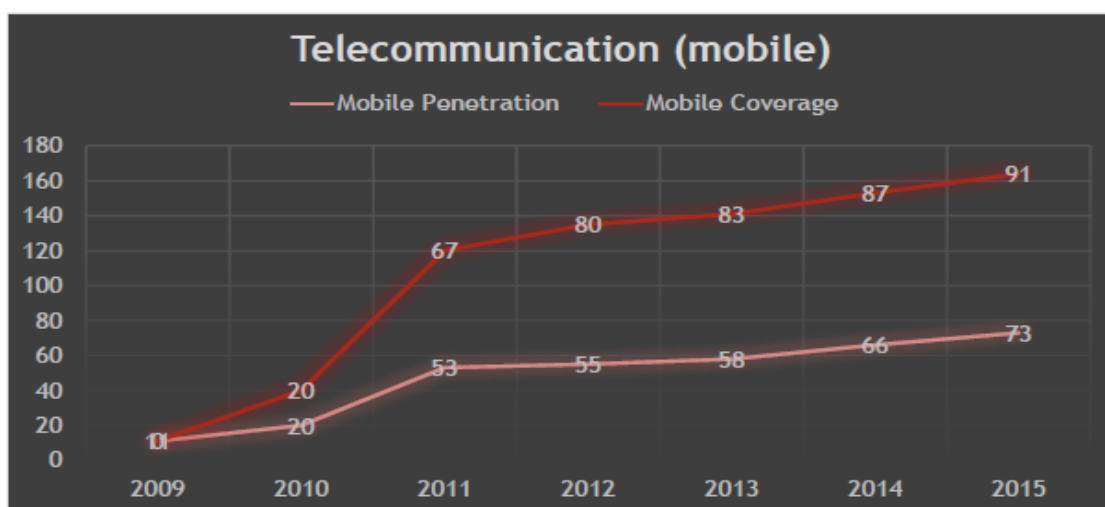
The introduction of the change ended the monopoly of Solomon Telekom and additional competitor in the form of BeMobile Ltd entered the market. The incumbent remains the sole landline service provider.

The liberalised market saw rapid increases in participation of populations and businesses and organisations in the use of products as a result of competition.

Indicator	2010 Actual	2015 Actual
Mobile Subscribers	115,500	424,712
Mobile Penetration	20%	73%
Mobile Coverage	20%	91%
Fixed Lines	8,400	7,438
<i>Internet Subscriber:</i>		
Mobile (3G)	8,205	66,664
Wireless	127	38
ADSL	1,359	1,382
DSL	1,163	592
<i>Internet Penetration:</i>		
Mobile (3G)	1.80%	11.5%
Fixed Line (ADSL)	0.2%	0.2%
Internet Providers (Active)	1	3
Gross Total Revenue(USD\$m)	35	48
GDP contribution	1.3	7.3
Mobile Network Operator	2	2
Class license registered	-	24

(Telecommunication Commission Annual report, 2015)

The coverage also increased as a result of direct competition when competitors compete for market share.



(Telecommunication Commission Annual report, 2015)

There is also change within government with the establishment of a single data centre. The SIG ICT policies:

- Government moving to E-Governance
- Government ICT Procurement Policies
- Email policy
- Asset management and disposal policies
- SIG ICT Standard Operating Environment policy
- SIG ICT Data Security Protection Policy

Current development in Solomon Islands telecommunications sector includes:

- Draft National Broadcasting Policy now approved by Cabinet
- Draft National ICT Policy now approved by Cabinet
- Development of National Cybersecurity Policy
- Universal Access Policy
- Telecommunications Policy Statement-reviews
- Fibre Optic cable from Sydney to Honiara-and to Noro (Western Province) and Auki (Malaita Province)
- Reviews of current Telecommunications Act 2009 to reflect current changes and development

The Government wishes to adopt international best practice and to ensure services are widely accessed in the country and is affordable through competition. The policy is focused on creating stability, fair competition, private investment in telecommunication investment and universal services obligations to be met where traditional market conditions may fail to work.

This policy also expresses the importance and intention to establish a legally, institutionally & financially separate independent regulator from the Government to regulate the telecommunication industry and sector in Solomon Islands. This is to be accompanied by a modern, independent and proportionate regulation based on international best practice.

The government will continue to develop policies that promote and enhance the sector that reflect current changes but also protect the rights of its citizens as they are exposed to modern advances in communication technology.