

Starlink's entry into the Pacific: the Samoan case

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Lechadlier Fanueli Lafaele helps set up Starlink at a residence in Samoa

Photo Credit: Fiafaitupe Tuiloma-Lafaele

This article draws on peer-reviewed research informed by analysis of Samoan media coverage. It reflects on Starlink's entry into Samoa and what it reveals about public communication, policy and regulation during the entry of new technologies.

Internet access varies across the Pacific Islands region. Data is **more expensive** in some countries than in others. Internet speeds **differ between locations**. Reliability of signal varies. Some communities remain **without network coverage**.

In just the last few years, **Starlink's low-Earth orbit satellite internet service** has entered the Pacific. Regulatory responses have varied, meaning that Starlink **status differs** between Pacific countries.

We recently published **a peer-reviewed paper** that looked into the developments in Samoa. For our paper, we monitored several Samoan media outlets for 13 months. The period from 1 January 2024 to 31 January 2025 was a critical one for internet access in Samoa, because Starlink was banned in January 2024 and approved in January 2025, with other developments during the intervening months.

Government regulation of Starlink received media attention and generated much interest during the period. Indicating a high level of public interest in Starlink, as perceived by the *Samoa Observer* newspaper's editor, ten news articles about the regulation of Starlink were placed on the front page of the printed edition during the period. Indeed, 19 *Samoa Observer* news articles on Starlink were placed on one of the first three pages of the newspaper. Clearly, this was a period of heightened interest in technology regulation.

We found that **the Office of the Regulator** (OOTR) had a shifting stance on Starlink's entry during the period. Coupled with consumer enthusiasm and media scrutiny, this created a challenging context for the communication of regulations. Our research found there were gaps in public communication about policy shifts. For example, following news articles containing announcements that Customs would seize Starlink equipment at the border, consumers might have been surprised by an

announcement on 26 June 2024 that the importation of Starlink kits had been approved. It is noteworthy that only very limited explanation was provided about this change of policy.

It seems regrettable that the OOTR and the local media did not provide clear guidance for consumers about using Starlink during this period, because consumers would likely have welcomed accurate and up-to-date information about what was permissible. The lack of clarity in communication on rapidly changing policies could have created confusion for Samoans over the legality of, for example, asking relatives to send Starlink equipment from abroad. The findings suggest more could have been done by the OOTR and the media to provide regular, clear and informative updates to the public.

While our research into media reporting has identified policy ambiguity and sudden shifts in position, it has not been able to ascertain what happened behind closed doors. It can be inferred from media coverage that Starlink and the OOTR were in frequent contact throughout the period. Indeed, there is evidence in the public record of negotiations between Pacific countries and Starlink. For example, the regulator in Papua New Guinea referred to “negotiations with Starlink” in [a notice](#) issued in December 2025.

Future research could aim to unpack what happened behind closed doors, not only in negotiations between Starlink and the OOTR, but also in other relevant conversations or communications during the period between various stakeholders. The negotiations for Starlink in Samoa were clearly unfolding in an environment of competing policy pressures, spanning issues such as licensing, spectrum management and potential impacts on existing telecommunications providers.

In response to our paper, it has been [pointed out](#) that this might not be the last time that a new technology is deployed using a direct-to-consumer model. Therefore, telecommunications regulators and government policy advisers might do well to learn lessons from the Starlink experience for application in the future. One such important consideration is that in a changing regulatory environment, clear and consistent public communication, although difficult to sustain, is critical when policy settings change.

While beyond the scope of our project, further research could usefully explore contextual factors, including possible constraints faced by telecommunications regulators in the Pacific. In particular, are such regulators adequately funded and sufficiently staffed to manage their workloads? To what extent are Pacific regulators able to operate independently? Do they experience political pressure? Are regulators trying to balance multiple competing demands? If so, to what extent do

they succeed in balancing competing pulls?

Further research could also seek to elicit the experiences of consumers. What were their experiences during the period of uncertainty that was the focus of this research project? And indeed, what have been their experiences since then? To what extent have people in Samoa actually been using Starlink's internet service? If so, what have been their impressions, as users of the service? Such an investigation could look into consumer experiences not only in Samoa but also in other parts of the Pacific during this period of technological change.

Read the full paper, [Starlink's entry into Samoa](#).

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