



Starlink's Entry into Samoa

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Introduction

In January 2025, a licence was issued for [Starlink](#) to offer internet services in the Pacific nation of Samoa. The announcement followed a year-long period during which government regulation of Starlink received media attention and generated much interest. This In Brief examines Samoan media coverage during the period leading up to the announcement in order to gauge levels of public communication regarding policy shifts in a period of heightened interest. We document the extent to which the public was informed and find that communications could have been more effective.

Methods

A systematic search of media products was undertaken for the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 January 2025. We reviewed four prominent media outlets that target Samoan audiences in print and online formats. In addition, we obtained and reviewed five public notices issued by the Office of the Regulator ([OOTR](#)) during this period.

The *Samoa Observer* is a daily English-language newspaper. Print copies were reviewed, and every page was checked for references to satellite communications. In addition, a keyword search was undertaken using a digital database of articles and the following search terms: 'Intelsat', 'Kacific', 'LEO', 'O3b', 'OB6', 'orbit', 'Pacsat', 'satellite', 'space', 'SpaceX', 'Starlink' and 'VSAT'.

[Talamua Online News](#) (Talamua) and [Newsline Samoa](#) are English-language online news outlets. We reviewed them through their 'find' functions using the same search conditions as above.

The government newspaper *Savali* is [written](#) in both English and the Samoan language. While the three news outlets above are private businesses, *Savali* is a government news outlet that [aims](#) to cover government policies. Effort was made to secure all *Savali* print editions from the period, though some editions were not accessible at the three main libraries in Apia. While there is also a *Savali* [website](#), the search button was not operational during the study period.

Findings

Media products gathered

The media search generated 27 relevant items from the *Samoa Observer* and four relevant items from Talamua.

The searches of *Newsline Samoa* and *Savali* produced no relevant items. Of the 27 *Samoa Observer* items, 22 were news articles, two were letters to the editor and three were editorials. Of the four Talamua items, three were news articles and one was a public notice issued by the OOTR.

All the items referred in some way to government regulation of Starlink. Indeed, most of the items focused on this issue, while just two focused instead on internet pricing and made only brief references to Starlink. Search terms related to other satellite providers did not generate any results.

Indicating a high level of public interest in Starlink, as perceived by the newspaper's editor, 10 of the *Samoa Observer* news articles started on the front page of the printed edition. In fact, 19 of the 22 *Samoa Observer* news articles began on one of the first three pages of the newspaper.

Timeline of events

From 1 January 2024 to 31 January 2025 was a critical period regarding internet access options in Samoa, because Starlink was banned in January 2024 and approved in January 2025, with other developments occurring during the intervening months.

An OOTR order dated 19 January 2024 required users to cease using Starlink equipment and surrender Starlink kits within five days or face penalties, due to stated concerns regarding 'public safety, national security, and the integrity of Samoa's telecommunication infrastructure'. This order implicitly acknowledged Starlink's service was being used in Samoa.

On 22 March 2024, the *Samoa Observer* reported that cabinet had approved Starlink, quoting a minister with an unrelated portfolio. More than a fortnight later, the OOTR clarified that this approval was for a specific project to support connectivity for schools and health centres. The *Samoa Observer* headline on 9 April stated: 'Starlink use not open to all'.

In mid-April, Talamua reported that SpaceX was attempting to apply for a Starlink licence in Samoa. In line with articles in the *Samoa Observer* in the same week, Talamua noted there was a ban on imports of Starlink equipment.

In May 2024, there were several news articles about the OOTR's imposition of fines for unregistered Starlink use. The *Samoa Observer* stated on 17 May that 'more than 100 active users have been detected

by the OOTR'. The same article noted that the OOTR would work with Customs from the start of June to confiscate devices at the border.

On 26 June 2024, the *Samoa Observer* informed consumers that they could import Starlink kits. However, on 16 August, news came of Starlink's decision to cease services in Samoa 'as it faces regulatory hurdles'. Starlink users in Samoa had been notified by the company that the service would cease on 21 August. On the following two days, 17 and 18 August, the *Samoa Observer* editorials focused on 'the Starlink problem'. On 21 August, the newspaper reported that those Starlink users who had registered with the OOTR could continue to use the service. Negotiations between the OOTR and Starlink were continuing and an interim arrangement had been reached.

News coverage in ensuing months provided updates regarding the ongoing negotiations. It appears the *Samoa Observer* was proactively contacting the OOTR to seek updates. A *Samoa Observer* news article published on 11 January 2025 announced cabinet approval, pricing in the Samoan currency and the involvement of [a list](#) of local resellers and retailers.

Discussion

Samoa's telecommunications environment is [regulated](#), and [recent initiatives](#) include a digital transformation strategy and a cybersecurity response mechanism. More than 100 active Starlink terminals were in use in Samoa by May 2024, suggesting that consumers were interested in adopting Starlink's services despite the rapidly changing developments surrounding its permissibility. The prominence of Starlink in the media supports the notion that satellite capability had become a salient issue for Samoans during the period.

If the *Samoa Observer* was proactive in asking for updates from the OOTR, as appears to be the case, this is commendable, given the consumer interest in Starlink access during the period. Nonetheless, there was insufficient information for consumers about what was deemed legal during the period.

For instance, an article in the *Samoa Observer* in mid-April 2024 stated that Customs would seize Starlink equipment at the border. The same outlet reported in mid-May that Customs would commence such activities from 1 June. It is not clear whether Customs permitted importation between mid-April and mid-May. Consumers may have been surprised by the announcement on 26 June 2024 that importation of Starlink kits had been

approved. Only very limited explanation was provided about this change of policy.

Another situation that may have created confusion was when the *Samoa Observer* reported on 12 April that a Samoan company was 'to partner with SpaceX's Starlink satellite services'. Although Talamua provided more details in the same week, it was not until January 2025 that *Samoa Observer* readers learnt that the company mentioned in April 2024 would work on the government connectivity project, rather than providing consumer services.

Conclusion

The OOTR's shifting stance on Starlink's entry, coupled with consumer enthusiasm and media scrutiny, created a challenging context for clear communication of regulations. Our research found there were gaps in public communication regarding policy shifts. 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 may have created confusion for Samoans over the legality of, for example, asking relatives to send Starlink equipment from abroad. Other consequences may have included people being fined for using or bringing in a terminal, paying higher prices than necessary, or not securing a terminal when it may have been permitted and beneficial. Further research could attempt to elicit the experiences of consumers, analyse coverage by media outlets based outside Samoa, or explore contextual factors.

This research has captured a period of heightened interest in internet access, due to the availability of a new technology. It shows there was a great deal of interest in the uptake of Starlink, which placed pressure on the OOTR to respond. The findings suggest more could have been done by the OOTR and the media to provide regular, clear and informative updates to the public.

Author notes

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