Dear Secretary,

The recent Optus network outage raises many concerns - certainly regarding the reliability, stability and security of the expanding telecommunications industry, and reliance thereon as a whole, but what occurred on 8th Nov 23 is representative of the dangers associated more generally, with consolidation of industry & commerce.

Over the past decade or two (perhaps even longer) there has been an observable and deliberate sell-off and privatisation of key public assets, infrastructure and networks, as well as overtake by large business and even larger corporations. Absorption of thousands upon thousands of small, local businesses, services and manufacturers, to a point where there is no longer a variety of choice when it comes to selecting products and services in this country. Within scope of the Optus outage, over 30% of the country had its collective eggs in that one basket, with some costly and devastating outcomes.

Referencing **point b** of your inquiry: *"the steps that Optus is taking to ensure that <u>this</u> does not happen again"* – would suppose that somebody knows precisely what occurred and how or why; if this is the case, it should be immediately made public, along with any known implications including short and longer-term repercussions.

Reference **point c.i.**: *"compensation offered by Optus"* The compensation of 100GB data was both pitiful & embarrassing, an insult to those affected; recompense should be financial and proportionate to the amount of hardship or loss endured. And the irony of offering something that may not actually be available when and if you truly need it – for instance in an emergency when all the 'systems' are offline! How many domestic users will actually have need or use of such a large amount of data-credit in any case?

As a notable 'coincidence', on the same day as the Optus outage, Telstra customers were in receipt of a communique with the heading: "We're stepping up our support", which then followed with "Ahead of the <u>upcoming disaster season</u> and what is set to be one of Australia's hottest summers, we are stepping up our support to help communities reconnect **when** <u>a natural disaster occurs.</u> It then provides a link to getting 'tech ready' for a disaster, and how to contact Telstra for support following a disaster; adding, <u>"Customers on a Telstra monthly mobile plan will automatically receive 100GB of extra data on their service if they're located in a disaster affected area"</u>.
I find the language used to be incredibly fearmongering, (or perhaps they know something that we don't... yet), but I again draw your attention to the parallels between the Optus outage and timing of this Telstra correspondence, noting the same offer of 100GB of data.

Point d. *"the role of government in ensuring Australians have reliable access to telecommunications technology".* One might argue the government should never have sold off the country's telecommunications in the first place, but as that ship has long sailed, I would strongly suggest that government oversight (likely, more overreach) is not going to prevent or rectify future such issues, whether technological or otherwise. You cannot stare authoritatively at a line of code proclaiming 'I am the government' and expect it to be resolved or compliant.

We are in an age where we have been shoe-horned into complex, advanced and consolidated systems, within single entities of control, and the vulnerabilities and risks are just beginning to be comprehended.

If you, the collective government, truly want to prevent such things in the future, stop all the consolidation!

Stop the push to Digital IDs, otherwise the next 'outage' could see everyone's identity catastrophically 'disappeared'.

Stop the push to cashless and forcing us toward a Central Bank Digital Currency, because when that system has an 'outage', the country stops! This was never more evident than during this Optus outage; people could not access their bank accounts to pay for services and businesses could not receive online payments. You can't have a 'cash outage', by the way. Preserving the availability of cash, access to it and the right to use it, needs to be protected – enshrined in law!

These things are important to remember as you conduct your inquiry and duly consider what really needs to be done to prevent such a massive occurrence ever happening again. And not just in the telecommunications sector but with all significant infrastructures and networks, that the day-to-day functions, health, wellbeing and necessities of all Australians rely upon.

Yours sincerely,

Winton Smith