



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Rural
and Regional Affairs and Transport References
Committee report:**

Shutdown of the 3G mobile network

August 2025

Australian Government response

The Australian Government appreciates the report by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the Committee) into the Shutdown of the 3G Mobile Network.

The Government's top priority in the lead up to the 3G switch off was to ensure that it was undertaken in a safe way and that risks to public safety were minimised as much as possible. To that end, the Government maintained regular contact with the telecommunications industry, including through the industry working group established at the request of the former Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP in March 2024. Government engagement with the telecommunications industry saw the creation of device checking tools, recorded voice announcements on affected handsets, scaled up communications efforts, including a six-week Australia-wide public awareness campaign, industry collaboration to identify impacted devices and voluntary delays of the 3G switch off date from industry. The Government also engaged extensively with government agencies, peak bodies and critical business sectors to support awareness efforts, and identify and mitigate any preparedness risks that may impact public safety or the economy.

A key concern in the lead up to the 3G switch off were those mobile handset devices that would not be able to call Triple Zero once 3G was switched off. To address this concern, on 21 August 2024 the former Minister directed the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to amend the Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2019, such that carriage service providers must not supply carriage services to mobile phones that cannot call Triple Zero. This change ensures that all mobile phones connected to a mobile network are able to call Triple Zero.

Looking ahead, the Government intends to carefully consider what more could be done to ensure an orderly process for future network transitions. On 17 December 2024, the former Minister hosted a 3G lessons learned roundtable involving the mobile network operators, telecommunications industry peak bodies, and consumer advocates. As Australia looks towards future technology transitions, it is clear that government and industry will need to continue to work in partnership to protect the public interest, particularly public safety, and ensure positive outcomes for all Australians. A communique jointly prepared by the Minister and the Australian telecommunications industry following the roundtable can be found on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (the Department) website at www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/3g-switch-off-communique.pdf.

The Committee raised concerns about decreased mobile service quality and coverage since the 3G networks were switched off, particularly in regional and remote areas. Telstra and Optus made commitments that customers who were within the 3G coverage zone, as indicated in their published coverage maps, would receive equivalent coverage after the switch off. The Government has made clear to the service providers the Government's expectation that the 3G switch off will deliver on the benefits they claimed end users would experience. The Government has asked the regulators, including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), to monitor this commitment.

The Government is monitoring reports that residents in some regional and rural parts of Australia are experiencing poorer service post-switch off and has been monitoring weekly reporting from Telstra and Optus in relation to the number of coverage-related complaints they receive. These reports indicate that only a small number of customer complaints have related to the 3G switch offs. Nevertheless, it is important that each customer's concern is looked into and that they are supported by their provider. Australians with concerns about the quality or coverage of the mobile service should bring those concerns to the attention of their service provider in the first instance.

The Government's responses to the specific recommendations of the report into the shutdown of the 3G mobile network are set out below.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a program to help customers that have lost mobile phone coverage since the 3G shutoff. This program should be co-funded between industry and government and be for the purpose of purchasing connectivity equipment for use by residents in rural and remote areas. For example, subsidies could be provided to purchase:

- boosters for buildings and vehicles;
- Starlink or other low-earth orbit satellite equipment, including access to mobile phone by Starlink services; and
- replacements for equipment rendered obsolete by the 3G shutdown.

The Australian Government **notes** the recommendation.

The Australian Government is committed to increasing connectivity, bridging the digital divide, improving mobile and broadband coverage and protecting communities against natural disasters. To this end, the Government is investing in regional communications, including \$1.1 billion through the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia. Additionally, since 2022, the Government has committed to investing up to \$5.4 billion in NBN Co for fibre network upgrades to over 2.1 million premises. Of these, nearly 1 million premises are in regional areas, with 660,000 being upgraded by the end of 2025. These fibre upgrades provide access to gigabit-capable higher speeds and more reliable internet connections.

The Better Connectivity Plan included \$656 million to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia, and provided \$480 million for the NBN Fixed Wireless and Satellite Upgrade Program (completed in late 2024). Of the \$656 million, the Government has announced or awarded over \$521 million across 14 separate initiatives, which funds a pipeline of over 500 projects to deliver new and enhanced connectivity across regional and rural Australia.

The Better Connectivity Plan included funding for new rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program and Regional Connectivity Program to invest in new mobile and broadband infrastructure across Australia. The Better Connectivity Plan has also provided funding for the On Farm Connectivity Program, the Mobile Network Hardening Program, and the Broadcasting Resilience Program.

The Government's On Farm Connectivity Program is providing \$53 million over 2023–24 to 2025–26 to enable primary producers in agriculture, forestry and/or fisheries to take advantage of connected machinery and sensor technology. The Program will assist primary producers extend connectivity and take advantage of connected machinery, sensor technology and other related services. The Program offers rebates to eligible primary producers for eligible connectivity equipment, including boosters, purchased from eligible suppliers.

Thousands of farmers and primary producers across Australia are already benefiting from the On Farm Connectivity Program. Following a successful first round, the Government increased the funding for Round 2 of the Program to \$18 million in 2024, alongside expanded eligibility to allow more farmers to participate. On 14 January 2025 the Government announced \$20 million toward a third round of the On Farm Connectivity Program. Round 3 will open for applications later in 2025, with funding to be delivered across 2025-26.

On 5 August 2025 the Hon Anika Wells MP, Minister for Communications and Minister for Sport, announced that NBN Co had signed an agreement with Amazon Project Kuiper to deliver broadband internet services via a constellation of Low Earth Orbit Satellites (LEOSats), about 600 kilometres above the Earth.

This represents a major change in technology from NBN Co's existing Sky Muster satellite services and will ensure continuity of high-speed internet for people living and working in regional and remote areas, and will stimulate competition in the LEOSat market.

In the lead up to the 3G switch off, service providers advised they were providing customers that were elderly, vulnerable and/or experiencing financial hardship with options to upgrade to low and no cost 4G and 5G compatible devices. In some instances, service providers have provided their customers with an external antenna or similar device at no cost so that they can remain connected.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Australian Government and the telecommunications industry do all they can to accelerate the introduction of mobile phone services via the Starlink network.

The Australian Government **does not agree** with the recommendation, as it would prioritise a particular commercial provider over others in the market.

The Australian Government has announced that it will introduce a Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) which will require mobile carriers to provide reasonable and equitable access to mobile voice and SMS outdoors across Australia. This is made possible by global innovations in LEOSats and the arrival of Direct to Device (D2D) technology, which enables signals from space to be sent direct to mobile devices. Whilst Starlink is the first of these services to market, it is expected that more providers will emerge in the near future.

While LEOSats are currently used to support fixed and 'mobility' broadband connections in Australia, D2D capability will allow the implementation of outdoor SMS and voice services. Initial D2D text services are now being offered by Telstra and it is expected that D2D capability will continue to develop over the coming years. The Government expects that D2D will complement, not replace, existing terrestrial telecommunications networks.

The announcement of the UOMO sends a very clear signal to the market that the Government wants to see D2D services delivered in Australia and wants a strong, competitive market to provide the best experience for end-users. To that end, the Government welcomes the delivery of D2D services by Starlink, but does not wish to prioritise a particular provider over its competitors, in what is a rapidly evolving market.

The Government remains committed to improving connectivity across Australia, including through improving fixed broadband and co-investing in traditional mobile coverage and capacity. The UOMO is expected to commence as soon as possible, subject to market developments, with development of framework legislation underway.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Australian Government increase the scope of the National Audit of Mobile Coverage to include off-road areas (including on private land such as farming and grazing properties). This could be achieved by enabling technology for people to 'pin' the location where service is available. Data gathered should be cross-referenced with that of the mobile network operators and published in an easy-to-access format.

The Australian Government **notes** the recommendation.

The Government's National Audit of Mobile Coverage is underway and aims to better identify mobile coverage black spots across Australia to help target future investment, and to provide an independent resource that better reflects on ground experiences of mobile coverage provided commercially by mobile network operators. Accenture Australia has been contracted to undertake the Audit on behalf of the Government.

The Audit involves drive testing around 180,000 km of regional and rural roads every year for 3 years, alongside static data collection in selected priority locations. Crowdsourced data collected from around 160,000 users across Australia where people actually use their mobiles is supplementing testing being undertaken by Accenture Australia. The data from the Audit provides granular information on coverage in an area, as well as the quality of mobile services. The Audit will run until 30 June 2027.

Results are published regularly on the Department's website. The mobile coverage data published by the Department allows users to overlay Telstra, Optus and TPG handheld coverage maps as provided to the ACCC.