

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

Good morning, Senators.

Firstly, let me say on behalf of Optus, the Board, the executive team, and the thousands of people across Australia who work at Optus, what happened on 18 September is unacceptable.

As the CEO, I am accountable for Optus' failings, and I am deeply sorry. We are all deeply sorry. The tragic deaths of people during this outage will stay with us as individuals and as a company as we investigate the incident and build on our response while progressing a sweeping transformation of Optus.

I joined this company a year ago because I know it is important for Australia that Optus succeeds.

When I arrived, Optus was implementing learnings from the 2022 cyberattack and the 2023 national outage.

But beyond that, with the support of the Board, I also instigated a company-wide transformation focused on process improvements, clear accountabilities and capability uplift of

both people and systems, all supported by a long-term strategic plan.

The kind of improvement Optus needs takes time, and I regret our reforms were not embedded earlier to prevent the events of September 18.

No telecommunications company can ever promise to stop all outages or disruptions; indeed, we have had outages since September 18.

Telcos must make sure their own networks are reliable. That's on each of us.

But we must also ensure that back-up systems, like camp-on (a critical mobile network function that allows a mobile phone to connect to the Triple Zero emergency call service using another carrier's network when the user's own network is unavailable), also work for Australians.

That's on **all** of us as an industry, including telcos, the device manufacturers, the industry, the regulator and Government.

The outage on September 18 was not a complex system failure, but it was a unique circumstance where Triple Zero was down while other calls continued normally.

The initial mistake - a human error - occurred when the wrong process plan was selected for a routine firewall upgrade. The selected plan did not divert traffic before locking equipment inside the exchange that routes Triple Zero calls.

As our submission outlines in detail, this error was not detected because control steps were not followed, and alarms were not acted on at the time.

The scenario – where Triple Zero was down but other calls were continuing – also had an impact on:

- existing systems and processes for detecting the outage while in progress,
- responding to customer calls alerting us to the outage,
- understanding the extent of the outage, and
- accessing customer data for welfare checks.

This is an explanation, not an excuse. We absolutely should be able to quickly identify a Triple Zero outage; call centre staff should be trained to escalate any mention of Triple Zero, and we should have the capability to access data and undertake the welfare checks faster.

As a result of what happened on 18 September, we made immediate changes to address those issues. Our submission sets out the changes in detail. In short:

- Every network change now requires explicit confirmation that emergency call routing is functioning both before and after the work is completed.
- We have implemented 24/7 state-by-state monitoring of Triple Zero call volumes and failure rates to enable faster detection of anomalies.
- Our contact centre procedures have been overhauled, including a mandatory escalation process for any customer reports of Triple Zero issues, ensuring they are

immediately referred to our Networks team for investigation.

- We have introduced daily manual Triple Zero test calls in every state and territory, with work underway to implement automated testing in collaboration with industry partners.
- A dedicated Critical Services Team has been established within our Networks function to provide a direct escalation point for frontline teams and ensure rapid response to incidents affecting calls to Triple Zero.

These actions are part of our broader commitment to rebuilding trust through meaningful change and action and ensuring Australians can rely on our network when it matters

I fully accept there are aspects to the way events unfolded, and how they were communicated, over September 18 and 19, that we should have handled better. I assure you we will learn from these.

We also recognise the need for more people onshore with the skills to manage complex situations, so we will add around 300

people to our Australian call centres focused on Triple Zero and vulnerable customers, including our Specialist Care teams helping customers in rural areas, elderly customers, or those with serious medical conditions.

In May this year, the Board approved management's proposal to take back in-house network activities currently performed by Nokia, both onshore and offshore. At the time, the aim was to transition this work progressively to May 2027, but I have now asked the Networks team to accelerate the move.

In addition to the onshoring activities in call centres and Networks, we are also recruiting 150 people to be part of a new Process Centre of Excellence in Australia to accelerate the transformation and overhaul procedures across the business.

There are many very talented and dedicated people at Optus, but all of us need to keep building a culture that seeks to deliver the best customer experience possible, supported by strong process, clear accountabilities and uplifted capability.

This can take time, but remains a key focus for the Board and the executive.

Understandably, there are questions arising about my position, but I firmly believe that another change of leader at this time is not what Optus needs, or what our customers need.

The disruption and uncertainty could actually set back the transformation underway and create further risks.

We are fully cooperating with ACMA's investigation and, of course, with this Inquiry.

In parallel, Dr Kerry Schott AO is leading an independent review into the causes of the outage, the management of Triple Zero calls, and our overall response. Her review is progressing and will be completed in the weeks ahead. We will share a copy of the report with the Committee to assist with this Inquiry.

To support your questioning today, Optus has also provided a detailed submission which includes a comprehensive timeline of events for the outage.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear and once again apologise to all those who called for help on September 18 but could not get through. Australians call Triple Zero at the most distressing time in their lives; they absolutely deserve to know their calls will be answered.

Thank you.