



**THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP**  
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **ACMA report highlights ways to improve telecommunications network resilience during bushfires**

Mobile network outages during the 2019-20 bushfires were overwhelmingly due to loss of power rather than fire damage, according to a report prepared by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) with assistance from industry peak bodies Communications Alliance and the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA).

Preparation and publication of this report was an action agreed at a telecommunication industry roundtable convened by Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, in January this year following the devastating bushfires of 2019-20, attended by the chief executives of Telstra, Optus, Vodafone and NBN Co along with many other senior industry representatives.

“Telecommunications services are crucial in emergency situations. This summer’s bushfires led to significant telecommunications network outages,” Minister Fletcher said.

“At one point 150 mobile base stations across New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were off the air, and over 20,000 NBN services were disrupted.

“While the telco industry acted quickly to restore services, these outages had a significant impact. For example, when mobile coverage was lost in holiday towns on the NSW south coast, tourists could not contact friends or loved ones, and many were unable to buy food and fuel because EFTPOS terminals which use the mobile network were not working.

“The ACMA report shows that the average length of an outage incident was 3.5 days. Temporary facilities such as generators, cells on wheels and satellite cells on wheels were deployed to restore services in over a third of cases.

“We know that more can, and will be done, to bolster network resilience and preparedness for natural disasters. One significant finding from the report is that direct fire damage accounted for only one per cent of outage incidents, with the vast majority of telecommunications outages caused by power outages.

“No telecommunications network is 100 per cent impervious to damage or destruction, be it from bushfire or other natural disasters. While the combination of mobile, fixed line, satellite connectivity and temporary facilities means we are better placed to keep communities connected than 20 or 30 years ago, it is important that we maintain focus on improving the resilience and redundancy of networks to support continuity of service for Australians during emergencies,” Minister Fletcher said.

The report is available at: [acma.gov.au/publications/2020-04/report/impacts-2019-20-bushfires-telecommunications-network](https://acma.gov.au/publications/2020-04/report/impacts-2019-20-bushfires-telecommunications-network)

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**Additional Information:**

The review looked at the period between 19 December 2019 and 31 January 2020, which included the peak of the 2019-20 bushfire season.

The types of facilities identified by the carriers as impacted by the bushfires, directly or indirectly, included mobile and fixed wireless base stations, nodes, exchanges, equipment shelters, copper and optical fibre cables.

Key findings from the ACMA's report, *Impacts of the 2019–20 bushfires on the telecommunications network report*, include:

- A total of 1,390 facilities were either directly impacted by fire damage or indirectly impacted by power outages or other factors. Of these, 23 percent avoided outages, while 26 percent experienced outages of less than four hours.
- The median length of outages considered by the review was 1.6 days, with facilities generally restored quickly.
- In 36 per cent of outages, the carriers were able to take temporary actions to restore coverage to the area while the cause of the outage was identified and addressed.
- Carriers deployed temporary facilities to restore services for over one-third of outage incidents.
- In two-thirds of cases, restoration efforts by the carriers were hindered by site access issues, such as fallen trees and debris.