



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

THE HON MARK COULTON MP
Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications
and Local Government

MEDIA RELEASE

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Strengthening Telecommunications Emergency Resilience

The Morrison McCormack Government is investing \$37.1 million to strengthen telecommunications resilience in bushfire and disaster prone areas so that communities can stay connected during emergencies.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coultan MP said the Government is taking swift action to implement measures to improve telecommunications resilience and redundancy following the 2019-20 bushfire season.

The four elements of the \$37.1 million package are:

Improving the resilience of regional and remote mobile phone base stations

\$18 million, including \$10 million from the Mobile Black Spot Program, will be spent on upgrades to mobile phone base stations to keep them operating for longer during bushfires. The main cause of base station outages in the 2019-20 bushfires was loss of mains power. This money will fund longer lasting backup power sources, such as batteries and diesel generators for base stations built under Rounds 1 and 2 of the Mobile Black Spot Program. A new competitive grants process to fund up to 50 per cent of the capital cost of upgrades to other mobile base stations.

Portable communications facilities to allow quicker service restoration

\$10 million will be allocated to purchase portable communications facilities such as cells on wheels (COWs), mobile exchanges on wheels (MEOWs) and NBN Road Muster trucks, which can be positioned in bushfire affected areas to allow communications services to be restored quickly. Funding will be allocated under a competitive grants process, with the telcos to own the portable facilities but give commitments to Government about their use during emergencies.

Program to deliver improved communications

\$2.1 million will be put towards a pilot program over the next two bushfire seasons to improve the information provided about access to telecommunications in emergencies.

Enhanced telecommunications for rural fire authorities and evacuation centres

\$7 million will fund the deployment of approximately 2,000 NBN Co satellite services across the country, to rural and country fire services and designated evacuation centres, to provide additional redundancy when fixed line connections are experiencing outages.

“Access to telecommunications before, during and after a disaster is critical. We need to learn from what happened in the 2019-20 bushfires – and make our networks more resilient in the future,” Minister Fletcher said.

“The measures we’re announcing today will help Australians stay connected when it matters most, and maintain the ability to contact family, insurers, and emergency and support services.”

Minister for Regional Communications Mark Coulton said the announcement provides a significant boost in the resilience of our mobile network that will help emergency services and communities stay connected for longer during emergencies.

“Supplementing today’s announcement is the discussion paper we recently released on the design of Round 5A of the Government’s Mobile Black Spot Program, to ensure that regional communities are benefiting as much as possible from this successful program,” Minister Coulton said.

“One of the objectives of Round 5A is to improve mobile connectivity for communities in disaster-prone regions, so in conjunction with this additional investment announced today, regional areas will be much better prepared during future emergencies.”

Minister Fletcher said: “We know how important it is to keep Australians connected, especially during emergencies. These measures are an important step in further strengthening our telco networks so they are as resilient as possible during future emergency situations.”

These measures are part of the \$650 million bushfire recovery funding package announced by the Morrison Government, focused on locally-led recovery to address the greatest community needs, which is a component of the Government’s \$2 billion National Bushfire Recovery Fund announced in January this year.

For more information visit: www.communications.gov.au/telco_resilience_package

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