



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

14 OCT 2013

Dear Chair

Thank you for your letter of 30 May 2013 concerning a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions by Mr George Christensen MP, Member for Dawson, to Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy, the then Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. As the matters raised in the petition fall within my portfolio responsibility, I have addressed them below.

I note that the petition requests that the Australian Government work with all telecommunications service providers to ensure that mobile phones and personal medical alert systems are able to connect to the Triple Zero emergency call service at all times.

The impact on telecommunications services of severe weather in Queensland caused by ex-tropical cyclone Oswald earlier this year was greater than any other recent natural disaster, with 438,000 PSTN services (i.e. fixed line telephones), 179,000 ADSL services (i.e. internet) and 777 mobile base stations operated by Telstra affected. The severe weather caused breaks in both Telstra's inland and coastal cables. These unprecedented cable outages resulted in the effective isolation of areas of central and north Queensland, and a loss of access to the Triple Zero emergency call service for affected customers. There were also localised incidents caused largely by loss of power and water damage.

The Australian Government is committed to an effective and efficient Triple Zero emergency call service which provides reliable access to emergency assistance.

My Department has engaged closely with Telstra on this matter. I can advise that Telstra undertook a post-incident review into the event and briefed the Department on the lessons learnt. Telstra has since implemented a number of technical measures to improve the overall resilience of its network and the availability of Triple Zero services in similar events.

One example that has been implemented nationally by Telstra is technology to ensure that mobile phones divert to other available networks in order to allow Triple Zero calls when Telstra's network experiences an outage. I understand Telstra has also installed

additional capacity in the area affected by the outage as a redundancy measure to preserve access to Triple Zero if its large cables are compromised in future.

Another lesson identified is the need for local contact numbers for emergency services and options for local diversion in the event that access to Triple Zero is disrupted.

Regarding the use of personal alert devices to access Triple Zero, this issue is currently being considered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority's Emergency Call Service Advisory Committee. Membership of the committee includes government departments, emergency service organisations, telecommunications providers and Telstra in its role as the national emergency call operator.

On broader network resilience issues, the Government works closely with the private sector through the Government's Trusted Information Sharing Network for Critical Infrastructure Resilience. The network comprises a number of sector groups, including the Communications Sector Group. Telstra is a member of the group and the lessons learnt by Telstra during this incident are informing the group's work on critical infrastructure resilience.

I trust this information will be of use to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Turnbull