



Australian Government

Department of Communications and the Arts

Review of the National Triple Zero (000) Operator

Implementation Plan

May 2016

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Introduction

For over 50 years, the Triple Zero (000) emergency call service has remained a reliable and highly trusted service within the Australian community. In 2014, a Review of the national Triple Zero operator (the Review) was announced to explore how the service can improve and continue to offer a world-class and technologically-adaptable service.

The Review has now been released, providing 11 recommendations related to six key themes – technology, governance and coordination arrangements, funding, delivery model, regulation and the possible tender for the Emergency Call Person.

In concert with the release of the Review, the Commonwealth Government has set out a high-level implementation plan detailing the Government's response to the Review's recommendations. While some of the recommendations can be dealt with immediately, others will require more detailed consideration to advance.

Key elements of the implementation plan include further improvements to the Triple Zero service to better identify the location of callers and the development of a framework to facilitate the effective adoption of new technologies.

The Government's response to recommendations regarding the governance, coordination and funding arrangements for the Triple Zero service will necessitate further consideration pending the outcomes of a number of ongoing review processes, including the Department of Communications review of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). The review of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) governance arrangements will take into account these proposals.

In light of ongoing work, the tender for the national Triple Zero operator will be deferred, and the Government is presently negotiating with Telstra to extend existing contractual arrangements to ensure certainty and stability for all stakeholders.

During the implementation phase, Government will work closely with key stakeholders in the telecommunications, emergency services, industry and government sectors.

Chapter One—Technology

Recommendation 1.1

The inclusion of capability to reliably receive and automatically forward more accurate location-based data (coordinates) from mobile emergency callers to Emergency Service Organisations should be a priority in the development of the Triple Zero service.

- The Australian Government should work with stakeholders to develop necessary standards and take a leadership role in progressing enhancements to the Emergency+ app and other necessary system changes to provide additional functionality so that detailed location coordinates can be automatically disclosed to Triple Zero during an emergency call.
- In parallel, the Emergency Call Person and State and Territory governments should also commence planning and implementing changes as a priority to support coordinated based positioning data being received and effectively disseminated by Emergency Service Organisations.

Recommendation 1.2

A set of technology principles and criteria to guide a nationally agreed, and consistent, integration of future technologies across the emergency service framework should be developed.

This may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- cost/benefits
- risks
- functionality
- user awareness and take up / likely longevity of technology
- network and stakeholder readiness / capability
- international standards / specifications.

Recommendation 1.3

Stakeholders involved with Triple Zero should undertake consultation to test consumer willingness to accept different service or performance characteristics in order to enhance and increase the use of new technologies within Triple Zero.

- It will be important to make clear to consumers the performance limitations of new or alternative technologies in terms of providing an emergency contact service, noting that they are likely to supplement rather than replace voice services.

Implementation strategy

The Government supports in principle these three recommendations.

The Department will commence a market testing process in 2016 for the development of an innovative solution enabling location coordinates to be automatically disclosed to Triple Zero during an emergency call from a mobile phone.

This is expected to allow a range of innovative technical solutions to come forward. This may include amendments to the existing Emergency+ smartphone app (as recommended), through to development of a new smartphone application, or via other means. The Department will release detail on the key functionality and features sought, but with an option for the market to also advise government of additional features or functionality which may be able to be supported.

The Department will work closely with the states/territories and relevant Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs) including by sharing relevant standards, technical data, and information to ensure system integration and future adoption of the capability can occur as easily as possible. There are already existing processes and standards in place so that ESOs can receive general information on the estimated location of mobile callers to Triple Zero, and it is expected these arrangements can be adapted so that more accurate coordinate based location data can be readily made available to state/territory ESOs.

The Department will further consult with key stakeholders on recommendation 1.2, including the scope and issues which would be considered as part of any agreed technology principles and criteria. This is expected to include discussions with the Australia Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), the Emergency Call Person, carriers and carriage service providers and state/territory governments (including ESOs). Importantly, this activity is not intended to replace existing work by a range of Triple Zero stakeholders who already actively consider new technologies and developments, but rather to provide an overall framework to assist in prioritising allocation of resources to new technologies that are most promising/beneficial.

In relation to recommendation 1.3, the Australian Government has undertaken market research in 2012 and 2014 on emergency call arrangements and consumer expectations, and notes a number of individual ESOs also undertake periodic or ad-hoc market research within their own jurisdictions both to examine performance of the Triple Zero system and consumer views and expectations.

The Department will continue to further consult with industry, state/territory governments, and consumer representation bodies to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to inform the scheduling and scope of future research activities to share and benchmark existing results, avoid duplication in any planned research activities, and leverage any relevant key data sets collected.

Chapter Two—Governance and Coordination

Recommendation 2.1

A Triple Zero Coordination Committee be established to replace the Emergency Call Service Advisory Committee, with the Department to work with the ACMA to review the existing membership, chair and working arrangements, and terms of reference. This Committee would have a high level focus on policy and coordination, but could establish technical and other working groups as needed.

- The Coordination Committee should include senior representatives from the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, and appropriate representation from the telecommunications industry, consumer groups and other stakeholders to inform decisions.
- The Coordination Committee would coordinate, but not replace the individual regulatory, funding/investment or other decision-making processes of its members.

Recommendation 2.2

The Triple Zero Coordination Committee should develop a set of non-binding core policy principles for potential national endorsement to inform and guide future strategic considerations for the Triple Zero service.

Recommendation 2.3

The Triple Zero Coordination Committee should be responsible for coordinating a national awareness-raising strategy to guide future and joint awareness-raising and promotional activities.

Implementation strategy

Recommendations 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 collectively relate to the establishment of a Triple Zero Coordination Committee to address current governance challenges and/or recognised shortcomings within the Triple Zero environment.

The Government supports in principle the need for robust governance and coordination arrangements for Triple Zero.

The Department proposes to revisit these recommendations at the conclusion the Department's review of the ACMA.

The Government has separately requested the Department review the overall objectives, functions, structure, governance and operation of the ACMA to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose for both the contemporary and future communications regulatory environment. It is not proposed to proceed with recommendation 2.1 to adjust the role of the Emergency Call Service Advisory Committee (ECSAC) pending finalisation of this broader review. The finalisation of this process will provide greater clarity and direction for revised national governance encompassing Triple Zero. The review of the governance arrangements for the ANZEMC will also encompass public safety communications policy issues. The ANZEMC review will take into account the proposed creation of the Triple Zero Coordination Committee.

In the interim, the Department will continue to engage with stakeholders to improve end-to-end coordination arrangements to inform future technological and operational requirements for Triple Zero via existing structures, without creating any new formal governance arrangements. ECSAC will continue to focus on monitoring and making appropriate improvements to the regulatory framework for the Triple Zero service with the Department continuing as an active member concerning key policy issues relating to Triple Zero.

Chapter Three—Funding

Recommendation 3.1

While the current funding framework has sustained the existing voice only Triple Zero service and some recent service improvements, there may be significant end to end future funding demands to accommodate service changes. The Triple Zero Coordination Committee should facilitate engagement between jurisdictions and other stakeholders to build and prosecute the business case for any major changes, including consideration of efficiencies to offset the expected costs.

Implementation strategy

The Government supports in principle the need for consideration of funding arrangements in relation to Triple Zero in the future.

Recommendation 3.1 will be further considered as part of ongoing engagement with stakeholders on governance and coordination arrangements (see above).

Chapter Four—Delivery Model

Recommendation 4.1

The Triple Zero service should maintain a national operator delivery model for the time being, as this remains an effective and proven model.

Implementation strategy

The Government supports this recommendation.

The review has found there is no immediate requirement to amend the existing central national delivery model and it will continue to perform in its current operational capacity. However, in responding to the national Triple Zero operator review, some industry stakeholders also suggested a 'shared' industry delivery model for the national operator function – particularly in a post NBN rollout environment. Although the review recognises that alternative approaches to a national operator may have potential, if any such arrangement was pursued would need to be carefully managed with all stakeholders, weighing up the cost, benefits and risks.

Notwithstanding the intent to maintain a national operator model, this does not preclude enhancements to the Triple Zero service that involve the introduction new and emerging technologies. For example, the review recognised that future implementation of SMS and/or video calling functionalities could potentially be configured as a caller-to-ESO functionality. However, alternative approaches would need to be coordinated with stakeholders to achieve successful and effective end-to-end capability. As noted in the review, any new technologies introduced are expected to complement, but not entirely replace, the existing model for handling voice calls to Triple Zero.

Chapter Five—Regulation

Recommendation 5.1

To ensure flexibility in regulatory arrangements, during a period of potential change to the Triple Zero service, consideration should be given to the Minister for Communications having a reserve capacity to direct the ACMA to make or amend legislative instruments dealing with key principles and requirements that apply specifically to the Emergency Call Person or the emergency call requirements applying more generally to the communications industry.

Recommendation 5.2

To the extent regulation is necessary for the effective functioning of the national operator and the broader ECSAC, the Commonwealth should as far as possible ensure that the federal legislative framework is technology neutral, flexible, responsive, and future proofed. However, non-regulatory options should be considered wherever appropriate.

Implementation strategy

The Government supports in principle the need for consideration of regulatory arrangements in relation to Triple Zero in the future.

The Government has requested that the Department separately review the overall objectives, functions, structure, governance and operation of the ACMA to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose for both the contemporary and future communications regulatory environment. Accordingly, it is not proposed to proceed with recommendation 5.1 pending the outcomes of that review. Regarding recommendation 5.2, the Department and the ACMA continue to explore options with stakeholders to reduce or avoid compliance costs imposed on the telecommunications industry and the community more broadly through the Government's better regulation agenda.

Chapter Six—Tender for the Emergency Call Person

Recommendation 6.1

The Commonwealth should seek to postpone the 2016 tender for the Emergency Call Person for up to two years so that long term policy and technology objectives, including location-based information capability and timing for transition of Triple Zero to an IP based environment, can first be resolved.

Implementation strategy

The Government supports this recommendation.

The future of Triple Zero will need to reflect an IP-based environment, which will offer greater flexibility and opportunities to work with stakeholders to enhance and implement existing functionality. There are also issues of governance/coordination which are desirable to further progress with stakeholders in advance of a tender. Finally, Government has identified as an immediate priority introducing coordinate-based capability to more accurately locate mobile callers to Triple Zero.

On balance, delaying the tender will provide time to clarify the future technical requirements of the national Triple Zero operator, work with stakeholders on governance arrangements and fully implement location based technologies for mobile calls to Triple Zero. This will ultimately ensure greater contestability in a future tender process.

Telstra has agreed to enter into discussion with the Government to extend existing contractual arrangements (first entered into in 2011), and will therefore remain the contracted Emergency Call Person for Triple Zero until a future tender is undertaken. This provides important certainty and stability for all stakeholders.