



# Bushfire telecommunications—remediation activities

- In response to the 2019-20 bushfire emergency, telecommunications carriers have been working in close coordination with Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs) and the Australian Defence Force to restore and maintain services and deploy temporary infrastructure as soon as is safely possible. This includes:
  - Organising site access, sometimes under escort, to assess damage to equipment and repairs as appropriate.
  - Liaising with ESOs to understand their telecommunications requirements, and prioritise restoration of critical emergency and utility services.
  - Determining the best approach to deploying temporary facilities for each site requirement, in conjunction with ESOs.
- Telecommunications carriers coordinate restoration efforts through the relevant state and territory authorities responsible for emergency management within each jurisdiction.
  - Telecommunications carriers prioritise assistance to ESOs and essential utility organisations with their telecommunications requirements.
  - Prioritisation of resource temporary deployment is then determined by factors including community isolation (especially communities unable to access Triple Zero), location of critical sites (broadcasting and emergency services communications networks), scale of the damage and risk of further damage.
- Telecommunications operators are deploying temporary facilities where damage to permanent infrastructure has occurred, and on the advice of ESOs, including:
  - Providing temporary Wi-Fi connectivity via satellite dish—NBN Road Muster trucks and the emergency installation of NBN Sky Muster satellite dishes, which were quickly deployed to several evacuation and relief centres. These facilities provide evacuees and ESOs with Wi-Fi connection, broadcasts of emergency information and mobile charging facilities.
  - Additional NBN Road Muster trucks with Wi-Fi capability have been pre-deployed and are on standby across the country, ready to mobilise and respond to requests from local authorities, where needed.
  - Deploying Satellite Cell on Wheels and Cell on Wheels to support emergency services operations and communities, for example at Mallacoota, Corryong, Bairnsdale and Malua Bay.
- Telecommunications operators are also providing additional assistance to customers, including:
  - Provision of satellite phones
  - Setting up charging stations and hot spots
  - Distributing pre-paid sim cards at evacuation centres
  - Disaster relief packages
- Telecommunications are dependent on power being available. While the above options are available, these are temporary in nature as outages will continue during protracted power outages and as the back-up power options (batteries and generators requiring fuel) are depleted.



## Telecommunications remediation summary

### NBN Co.

- **During January 2020, 3** NBN Road Muster Trucks and generators were deployed to Batemans Bay, Malua Bay and between Cobargo and Narooma as required, to provide assistance to the community evacuation centres in the region, as required.
- **NBN Co also provided more than 25** evacuation centres with an active NBN service and Wi-Fi. These sites have supported around 5000 residents, business owners, volunteers and other support staff in fire affected areas.

For up-to-date information visit: [www.nbnco.com.au/blog/the-nbn-project/bushfire-recovery-and-support-updates](http://www.nbnco.com.au/blog/the-nbn-project/bushfire-recovery-and-support-updates).

### Telstra

- During January 2020 Telstra deployed their Cell on Wheels temporary facilities to support emergency services operations and communities in affected areas, such as Corryong, Mallacoota and Walwa.
- Additional distribution of satellite phones to emergency services and communities in Victoria.
- Free use of the national payphone network to all customers for local, national and standard mobile calls from 6 January until further notice.
- Free use of the Telstra Air Wi-Fi network at enabled locations from 6 January until further notice.

For up-to-date information visit: <https://exchange.telstra.com.au/category/telstra-news/>.

### Optus

- During January 2020, Optus stationed generators throughout NSW and Victoria to deploy as backup power at affected sites when safe to do so.
- They also deployed temporary telecommunications facilities in specific areas to support communities and communications, for example at LaTrobe Hospital in Victoria, and Malua Bay and Tumbarumba in NSW.
- Provision of unmetered internet access to a range of emergency services websites for those in bushfire affected areas.

For up-to-date information visit: [www.optus.com.au/about/media-centre/bushfire-support](http://www.optus.com.au/about/media-centre/bushfire-support).

### Vodafone

For up-to-date information visit: [www.vodafone.com.au/bushfire-support](http://www.vodafone.com.au/bushfire-support).



## Telecommunications Relief packages

### Telstra

**Customers:** In January 2020 Telstra issued a Disaster Relief Package for customers in impacted areas in [Vic](#), [NSW](#) and [SA](#) which included the following:

*Short term measures (for Telstra customers who have a short-term impact—temporary evacuation of premises or temporary fault):*

- Free use of Telstra public payphones in the affected areas
- Free use of Telstra Air payphone hotspots in the affected areas
- Free call diversion from an affected fixed home or business phone service to another fixed or mobile service of the customer's choice, regardless of the carrier
- Customers who use the free call diversion to divert their affected fixed home or business phone to their Telstra mobile service can also make local and STD® calls on their mobile at fixed-line rates, in accordance with their selected plan (limited to one designated Telstra mobile per affected household or business).
- Affected Telstra mobile customers who do not have a Telstra home phone can receive a one-off credit to the value of \$100 inc. GST (limited to one mobile phone per Telstra mobile account).

The above offers are applicable until network damage in the area due to fire is repaired, or while customers remain evacuated, for a maximum period of three months from the date of the fires.

*Long-term measures (for Telstra customers who have suffered severe damage to or loss of their premises):*

- Free call diversion from the customer's Telstra fixed phone service to another Australian fixed or mobile service of their choice, regardless of the carrier. This offer is applicable for a maximum period of 6 months from the date of the fire.
- In addition, Telstra will apply a one-off credit to the value of \$500 inc. GST to the customer's Telstra fixed phone account to help cover the costs of the following, if required:
  - Connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at one temporary residence
  - Re-connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at the customer's original permanent premises.

**Front line responders:** Telstra offered [free mobile phone bills](#) for volunteer firefighters and SES volunteers. Farm Fighters—farmers with personal firefighting equipment/units who support their community when under threat from a bushfire—are also eligible.

**Free payphones and Wi-Fi hotspots for all:** Telstra made their [payphone network around the country available to provide free local, national and standard mobile calls](#). They will also be allowing free use of the Telstra Air Wi-Fi network at locations where payphones are equipped to provide this. This took effect on 6 January and will be available until further notice.

## Optus

**Customers:** Optus has established a dedicated customer contact line for customers affected by the bushfires—1300 301 671. All other customers seeking assistance for other matters can ring the Optus Customer Care line on 133 937.

Optus has in place a financial assistance policy to support customers affected by the bushfires in NSW and Victoria which can include:

- free call diversions from an Optus fixed home phone to any mobile or fixed number
- extended timeframes for bill payments
- bill waivers in instances of extreme financial hardship; and
- free suspension, relocation or cancellation of a fixed service
- free prepaid credit which can be organised at local Optus stores
- unmetered internet access to a range of emergency services websites for those in bushfire affected areas.

**Front line responders:** Firefighters, volunteers and staff affected by bushfires should also use the dedicated contact line—1300 301 671. Optus are covering the cost of volunteer fire fighters' and SES volunteers' mobile services for December and January.

**On ground support to affected areas:** Optus are providing on the ground support in bushfire affected zones including evacuation centres by providing charging stations, pre-paid SIMs, satellite and mobile phone access.

## Vodafone Australia

Vodafone has offered a range of relief options including 2 months' free services to a wide range of volunteers, access to Vodafone's hardship policy for payment support/relief, free mobile Wi-Fi for those who have lost their home, and extra data for impacted customers. Updated details can be found here: [www.vodafone.com.au/bushfire-support](http://www.vodafone.com.au/bushfire-support).

Vodafone will continue to offer support and are looking at more ways to help those affected by the bushfires.

Affected customers should contact VHA's Financial Hardship team—1300 650 405.