



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Rural
and Regional Affairs and Transport References
Committee report:**

Shutdown of the 3G mobile network: Interim report

August 2024

Australian Government response

The Australian Government notes the interim report by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the committee) into the Shutdown of the 3G Mobile Network. The Government appreciates the committee's work, including its consideration of the written and oral submissions made to the inquiry. The committee's efforts have helped raise public awareness of the approaching 3G switchovers. The Government's responses to the recommendations of the interim report into the shutdown of the 3G mobile network are set out below.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Minister for Communications (minister) urgently meet with Telstra and Optus to seek their agreement to extend the shutdown of the 3G network until the minister is satisfied that the following conditions are met:

- the 4G network provides coverage equivalent to or better than the coverage provided by the licensee's 3G network; and
- that best endeavours have been made by government and industry to audit the number and type of devices that will be affected and to take reasonable efforts to contact affected consumers of those devices.

The Australian Government **notes** the recommendation.

The Australian Government recognises that telecommunications services are fundamental to the functioning of society and network transitions are an important part of technological evolution. The commercial decision of Australia's mobile network operators to close their 3G networks will enable spectrum to be redeployed for improved 4G and 5G services, which will deliver better data capacity and speed. However, the potential risks to public safety means that the transition needs to be managed in a safe way.

On 14 August 2024, Telstra and Optus announced they would delay their respective 3G switchovers until 28 October 2024 to give customers and businesses more time to prepare. This is an encouraging step towards managing the technological transition in a safer way. Telstra and Optus also announced plans to undertake a joint six-week public safety mass marketing campaign, aiming to reach more than 90 per cent of the population to raise awareness of the 3G switchover, including the impact on both traditional handsets and other devices that rely on the 3G network, such as personal medical alarms.

Telstra has committed to ensuring 3G-only areas within its published coverage area will have equivalent 4G coverage prior to its 3G network switchover, and has informed the Government that it is undertaking independent testing in impacted areas to confirm there will be no loss of coverage. Optus has also indicated that there will be no loss of coverage following its 3G switchover and that it will continue to operate a small number of sites in regional areas while upgrades are carried out in order to meet this commitment.

The 3G Network Closure Working Group, established by the Government in March this year, will continue to address concerns about the risks to public safety, work together to identify affected device categories, share information on identifying and contacting customers with impacted devices and make information available to the community on the impacts of the 3G switchovers. The Government continues to work with the industry to identify impacted devices and customers, verify device identification methods and better understand how devices operating on the networks may be affected.

Recommendation 2

In the event that Telstra and/or Optus are not willing to agree to extend their 3G network shutdown, subject to the conditions listed in Recommendation 1, the committee recommends that, prior to 30 August 2024, the Minister for Communications places conditions on the relevant carrier by making a declaration similar to the *Carrier Licence Conditions (Telstra Corporation Limited) Declaration 1997*. As a minimum, the declaration should specify the conditions outlined in Recommendation 1.

The Australian Government **notes** the recommendation.

As above, on 14 August 2024, Telstra and Optus announced they would delay their respective 3G switchovers until 28 October 2024 to give customers and businesses more time to prepare. This is an encouraging step towards managing the technological transition in a safer way. Telstra and Optus also announced plans to undertake a joint six-week public safety mass marketing campaign, aiming to reach more than 90 per cent of the population to raise awareness of the 3G switchover, including the impact on both traditional handsets and other devices that rely on the 3G network, such as personal medical alarms.

Options exist under law for the Minister for Communications to consider regulatory intervention if warranted in the public interest (subject to required consultation and procedural processes) including proposals to further delay the planned 3G switchovers. The Minister continues to consider those options.

Recommendation 3

The Australian Government should lead a best endeavours process, with industry cooperation, to audit the number and type of non-telephone devices that could be impacted by the 3G shutdown and help consumers who are impacted by the shutdown to mitigate any impact on them. This audit should be targeted towards devices that are likely to have a significant impact on public health, safety, and business operations.

The Australian Government **notes** the recommendation.

The Government is monitoring the potential impacts of the 3G switchover on critical sectors of the economy, and is engaging industry bodies and representatives to understand the potential risks. The Government is also supporting industry's efforts to engage customers that may be in vulnerable circumstances or require additional support by amplifying messaging via relevant peak organisations and government agencies. The Government continues to work with the industry to identify impacted devices and customers, verify device identification methods and better understand how devices operating on the networks may be affected.

The 3G Network Closure Working Group, established by the Government in March this year, will continue to address concerns about the risks to public safety, work together to identify affected device categories, share information on identifying and contacting customers with impacted devices and make information available to the community on the impacts of the 3G switchovers.