



Australian Government



Australian
Small Business and
Family Enterprise
Ombudsman

31 May 2024

Senator the Hon Matt Canavan
Chair, Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament of Australia
PO BOX 6100
Canberra ACT 2600

via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Canavan

Shutdown of the 3G mobile network

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the shutdown of the 3G Mobile Network. Australia's major telecommunications providers have indicated that they will end support for the 3G network by September 2024, which has the potential to adversely affect a diverse array of small businesses.

The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman has issued a media release and conducted interviews urging small, family and farming businesses to make sure they are not caught out by the 3G switch-off happening in August and September.

We have heard from stakeholders that vital equipment and software can still rely on 3G networks, including those relating to record-keeping, accounts, bookings, payroll, telephones, EFTPOS, security systems, cameras, asset-tracking tools, surveying instruments, water and environmental monitors, medical alerts and many of the wireless operating systems on farms. Some of this equipment can be expensive and must be sourced from overseas companies with extended waiting lists.

Additionally, some 4G-enabled devices, including emergency alert systems, have elements or functions that are powered by 3G. Users may be unaware of these components until they stop working. Loss of access to these services, owing to a disconnection from telecommunications services, could have catastrophic effects on the viability of small businesses.

The ASBFEO acknowledges that there is work under way to prevent or mitigate the harms of a disconnection in 3G services. The National Audit of Mobile Coverage, which is expected to conclude in June 2027, will be vital to mapping the locations of areas that do not have access to 4G and 5G coverage.¹ The Mobile Black Spot Program, Regional Connectivity program and State and Territory co-investment programs have been vital to ensuring that rural and remote small businesses have access to quality telecommunication services, however communications expenses are estimated to decrease from 2024-25 to 2027-28.² The Australian Government should continue to ensure small businesses have reliable access to telecommunications technology and support measures to improve the resilience, redundancy and availability of telecommunications.

¹ Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and Arts (DITRDCA), *National Audit of Mobile Coverage*, DITRDCA, Australian Government, accessed 22 May 2024.

² The Treasury, *Budget Paper No.1*, The Treasury, Australian Government, May 2024, p. 220.



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Recommendation 1: The Australian Government and affected industries should engage in a targeted education scheme

A coordinated education and awareness campaign by the government, telecommunications providers and technology companies targeted to small businesses would improve their awareness of the implications of the shutdown of the 3G networks, and allow them to seek options to replace their equipment before September 2024. The government and industry could also coordinate and reinforce their campaigns by focusing on the particular services and devices that will be affected, as well as highlight the need to speak with suppliers to organise replacements.

While the ASBFEO understands that telecommunications providers are reaching out to customers who have 3G connected 'phones, small businesses may not be aware of other devices that still rely on 3G networks. Accordingly, the ASBFEO encourages government and affected industries to reach out to owners of other 3G connected devices to alert them of the coming changes.

Recommendation 2: Where upgrades are made to broadband infrastructure, mobile 'phone transmitters should be installed or enhanced as well

Access to reliable and affordable telecommunications services is essential for small and family businesses to conduct their business. In continuing to fund the expansion and upgrading of broadband infrastructure, the government should take every practicable opportunity to install mobile telecommunications infrastructure. This will help energise enterprise in regional Australia and support their engagement in Australia's technology-driven economy.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Policy & Advocacy team at the ASBFEO, via email at advocacy@asbfeo.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

The Hon Bruce Billson

Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman