

# Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning - The electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024

## Question on Notice for NSW Telco Authority

(Hearing: 17 March 2025)

## Transcript

RANIA WANNOUS: We deployed 21 mobile assets in total. These included Cells on Wheels, which we call COWs, as well as generators. This was deployed to either support or augment the PSN's coverage. Locations for our deployment included Broken Hill, Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Tibooburra and Menindee.

Mrs JUDY HANNAN: At what point were they deployed?

RANIA WANNOUS: The exact day? I think I might have to take that on notice. We'll get you those exact details, unless you have them?

JOSH WESTON: No, I was just going to say that, as the situation unfolded and we became more aware of the extended nature of the event, that it wasn't just a small blip in power supply, that's when the operational decisions were made to deploy additional resources. But the exact timing we'll have to come back to you on.

**Mrs JUDY HANNAN: Can I please get those details from you? You were talking about Alfred and what you deployed in preparation, so I'd be curious to know when you actually deployed your assets. And they only got deployed to help Broken Hill area, is that correct?**

RANIA WANNOUS: And some of the towns around there. We can provide you with a list of the assets we deployed and the locations we deployed them to, yes.

Mrs JUDY HANNAN: That would be really good. Thank you very much.

**Answer is on the following page.**

# Question on Notice

**Can the committee obtain a list of assets that were deployed by NSW Telco Authority, when these assets were actually deployed and if they were just deployed to the Broken Hill area?**

## Context:

The **Public Safety Network** is managed by NSW Telco Authority and delivers mission-critical radio communications exclusively for emergency and essential services so they can coordinate emergency operations. It is not accessible to the public or used by commercial Mobile Network Operators.

**Commercial Mobile Network Operators** are responsible for operating, maintaining and restoring their telecommunications infrastructure, including deploying assets to maintain their network's coverage and management of power redundancy.

## Answer:

NSW Telco Authority managed 14 deployments of 11 assets. All assets were deployed to support the operation of Public Safety Network infrastructure for emergency and essential services. The type and quantity of assets deployed was based on site risk assessments, requests from emergency and essential service customers who use the Public Safety Network and available assets.

To enhance emergency planning and response, some assets were deployed to more than one location on multiple dates. In some instances, assets were pre-deployed or 'staged' at various locations on standby, to be put into operation if needed.

Assets were deployed to Broken Hill, Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Menindee and Tibooburra and included:

- **4 Mobile Radio Assets (P25 Cell on Wheels)** which provide augmented coverage, backhaul, capacity and power to Public Safety Network sites to ensure the network remains operational so that Emergency Services Organisations can communicate with each other and stay safe and connected.
- **3 very small aperture terminals (VSAT)** used to ensure connectivity for Public Safety Network sites in the event of carrier infrastructure unavailability.
- **4 generators** which were used to provide backup power to Public Safety Network infrastructure.

A timeline of asset deployments is in the table below:

NSW Telco Authority asset deployments to support the operation of the Public Safety Network	
17 October 2024	1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed to Menindee.
18 October 2024	1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed to Wilcannia Police station. 1 VSAT deployed to Menindee.
19 October 2024	1 Mobile Radio Asset redeployed from Wilcannia Police Station to Broken Hill Police station. 1 VSAT activated in Menindee. 1 hire generator deployed and activated in Menindee.
22 October 2024	1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed on standby in Wilcannia. 1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed on standby in Tibooburra. 1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed on standby in Broken Hill. 1 Mobile Radio Asset deployed on standby in White Cliffs.
23 October 2024	1 Mobile Radio Asset activated in Wilcannia. 1 Mobile Radio Asset activated in Tibooburra. 1 Mobile Radio Asset activated in Broken Hill. 1 Mobile Radio Asset activated in White Cliffs. 1 VSAT deployed and activated in Thackaringa. 1 VSAT deployed and activated in Dubbo. 2 hire generators deployed and activated in Broken Hill 1 hire generator deployed and activated in Thackaringa. 4 x 1000 litre bulk fuel pods and 2 x 10kva generators deployed on standby at Broken Hill.
24 October 2024	1 MRA deployed on standby at Broken Hill NSW State Emergency Service compound.

*\*Deployed: refers to assets being mobilised to the impacted area or site in readiness for operation.*

*\*\*Activated: refers to assets that were both deployed and then operationalised.*

ENDS

Legislative Assembly Committee on  
Environment and Planning - The  
electricity outages affecting Far West  
NSW in October 2024  
Supplementary Questions for NSW Telco  
Authority

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# Supplementary Questions

## NSW Telco Authority

**1. We heard that the electricity emergency subplan was activated quickly. Was the Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit (TEMU) also activated under the Telecommunications Services Supporting Plan (TELCOPLAN) during the outages?**

The Telecommunications Services Functional Area Supporting Plan (TELCOPLAN) always remains activated to ensure a coordinated response to, and recovery from, a telecommunications-related emergency.

NSW Telco Authority's Telecommunications Emergency Management Unit (TEMU) leads the Telecommunications Services Functional Area (TELCOFA), which coordinates 24/7 support for telecommunications during emergencies. TEMU maintains a 100% operational readiness at all times.

During an emergency or state response, the TELCOFA works with combat agencies and other Functional Areas to provide support for the Public Safety Network, exclusively used by emergency and essential services, to ensure it is always operational for first responders. The TELCOFA also works with commercial Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to help safeguard their infrastructure and assets. It will deploy liaison officers to State Emergency Operations Centres or at regional locations across NSW when needed.

The TELCOFA initiated an operational response on 17 October 2024, following notification from the Energy and Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA) that there was a significant power outage in the Far West of NSW, with an unknown restoration time.

The TELCOFA remained in an operational response phase until 4 November 2024, providing ongoing support for the state's emergency response to the power outages, until it determined the emergency telecommunications response was complete.

**1a. If so, what actions did the Emergency Management Unit take to respond to the telecommunications emergency?**

The TEMU took part in State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOC) and Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) meetings (see **Table 1** on page 5). It also managed:

- **coordination with the Energy and Utilities Services Functional Area (EUSFA)**
  - worked with EUSFA and commercial mobile network operators to flag commercial telecommunication sites for priority restoration.
  - shared situational awareness provided by EUSFA on the size, scale, impact and duration of power outages, with commercial MNOs to support their operational planning and response.
  - worked with Telstra and other commercial MNOs to provide National Metering Identifiers for their commercial mobile telecommunication sites in the impacted area

so the EUSFA could inform the Distribution Network Service Provider (Essential Energy) expedited site restoration at these locations.

- requested load shedding schedules (including timing, outage duration, and locations) so the TEMU could inform commercial mobile network operators to enable effective operational planning, (limited details were able to be provided due to the nature of the event).
  - actioned a request from EUSFA to support telecommunications for power workers in Broken Hill restoring Transgrid transmission lines which resulted in Telstra providing Starlink Kits and a satellite phone for these workers.
- **coordination with Emergency Services Organisations and commercial Mobile Network Operators**
    - hosted 5 operational meetings with commercial MNOs and Communications Commanders from ESOs as a forum for sharing situational updates, as well as key risks, impacts and priorities for communications restoration.
    - advised Emergency Services Organisations and commercial mobile network operators that all generators in the region being used for telecommunications redundancy should remain in place with technicians on stand-by until transmission lines were restored.

**1b. If not, why was it not activated, either by the combat agency, REOC or by the Telecommunications Services Functional Area Coordinator (TelcoFAC)?**

Not applicable. See response to question 1, above.

**2. At the public hearing in Broken Hill, Telstra said that they worked with you to support the provision of telecommunication services during the outages. How did you work with Telstra to maintain mobile phone reception?**

The TELCOFA relies on information from 'Supporting Organisations' under the NSW Telecommunication Services Functional Area Supporting Plan, particularly during major service disruptions. Telstra are a 'Supporting Organisation' and voluntarily participate in and provide specialist resources, to support the government's emergency response and recovery operations.

The TEMU had ongoing communication with Telstra (and other commercial MNOs) to understand commercial telecommunications site impacts, potential isolated suburbs, priority sites for restoration as well as when restoration works were being undertaken.

The TEMU shared situational awareness provided by EUSFA regarding the size, scale, impact and duration of power outages, with Telstra to support their operational planning and response. Telstra also provided the TEMU with National Metering Identifiers for their commercial mobile telecommunication sites in the impacted area which was shared with EUSFA.

Commercial MNOs are responsible for operating, maintaining and restoring mobile phone coverage for the community when their assets experience an outage.

To restore mobile reception for the community faster, the TEMU proposed that emergency services on the ground in impacted locations could operate the generators on Telstra's behalf. Telstra declined this offer of support due to a range of operational safety and security concerns with non-Telstra technicians operating their specialised equipment.

### **3. Does the Telco Authority or the Minister have any role in regulating or overseeing whether telecommunications carrier service providers have adequate backup power supply in the event of an emergency?**

NSW Telco Authority does not regulate telecommunications in NSW, including the Triple Zero Emergency Call Service.

Currently, neither the Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government or NSW Telco Authority can place obligations on commercial mobile network operators to have adequate power redundancy at their assets.

The Federal Government has regulatory oversight of telecommunications and commercial MNOs. Commercial MNOs are also responsible for the restoration of their assets during an outage, including managing power redundancy.

NSW Telco Authority would support the establishment of:

- Power resilience standards for commercial Mobile Network Operator networks such as battery back-up and generators (but notes that different requirements would depend on infrastructure location and site criticality)
- Greater electricity grid resilience.

NSW Telco Authority also continues to advocate for other reforms that would enhance our capabilities during a disaster response.

This includes the provision of information from commercial MNOs relating to mobile tower locations, topography and facilities and real-time operational data (such as outages) that is shared with public and emergency services. The introduction of disaster roaming for Emergency Services Organisations and temporary disaster roaming for communities would also improve disaster response.



**Table 1 List of State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOC) and Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) meetings where the TEMU participated**

Forum	Date	Time
State Emergency Management Committee	17/10/24	16:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	17/10/24	17:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	18/10/24	12:30
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	19/10/24	12:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	20/10/24	12:00
State Emergency Management Committee	21/10/24	13:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	21/10/24	22:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	22/10/24	09:00
TELCOFA -Carrier and ESO Comms Commander Operational Meeting	22/10/24	13:00
State Emergency Management Committee	22/10/24	14:30
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	22/10/24	17:30
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	23/10/24	11:00
TELCOFA -Carrier and ESO Comms Commander Operational Meeting	23/10/24	14:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	25/10/24	11:00
TELCOFA -Carrier and ESO Comms Commander Operational Meeting	25/10/24	14:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	28/10/24	11:00
TELCOFA -Carrier and ESO Comms Commander Operational Meeting	28/10/24	13:00
Far West Regional Emergency Management Committee	01/11/24	11:00
TELCOFA -Carrier and ESO Comms Commander Operational Meeting	01/11/24	13:00

**ENDS**