



New South Wales Legislative Committee on Environment and Planning: Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024.

Telstra Response: Questions on Notice and
Supplementary Questions.

27 March 2025



1. Questions on Notice

Telstra welcomes the opportunity to respond to questions taken on notice, and additional information sought by the committee through the supplementary questions received on 20 March 2025.

This first section of our reply contains our answers to the questions taken on notice at the hearing.

Question 1: One of your poles has a generator on it and (White Cliff), when it needs to be started, somebody has to come from Dubbo. I beg to ask a couple of questions. It's a six-hour trip, at least, one way. They say that sometimes the power might only go out for 20 seconds or a couple of hours. The guy could be halfway here or whatever. If it's six hours one way and six hours the other, presumably there's at least a night's coverage. Two questions. Why do you not have somebody locally that can do that generator that's either employed by you or some contractor locally that can do that for these people?

White Cliffs currently has an operating battery reserve of around 15 hours which automatically supports the site in the event of a mains power outage. This amount of reserve typically provides time for a Telstra technician to attend the site, which is based on our understanding of when the electricity grid is likely to be re-energised.

For completeness, White Cliffs does not have a permanent generator situated at this site. There is, however, legacy equipment attached to the pole which has not been in operation for some time.

Q2: Did Telstra apply for any funding, or has it been awarded funding under the Federal Government's Mobile Network Hardening Program for the sites that are in the Far West?

As co-investment grant programs are confidential, Telstra is not able to provide information to the committee about which Telstra site(s) was/were put forward for consideration to be awarded improved power backup solutions under the various rounds of the Federal Government's Mobile Network Hardening Program (MNHP). We can say that historically, Telstra has not been awarded projects under previous (closed) MNHP rounds to improve power resilience at our sites in Far West NSW, although we have been successful in other sites around Australia in those rounds.

Telstra remains committed to participation in Government co-investment programs designed to uplift the resilience of our network, including future MNHP rounds. We have also been successful recipients of the Federal Government's Strengthen Telecommunications Against Natural Disaster (STAND) projects to deliver a mix of battery upgrades, permanent generators, and portable generators at other locations across Australia, including NSW.

Q3: What date did you make the decision to pull back generators deployed across Broken Hill?

Across 19 and 20 October 2024, as part of a staged approach, Telstra started disconnecting and removing its temporary generators from previously impacted sites. This is because power had been restored to the sites (from the gas turbine generator mains supply). Even though Telstra had disconnected all its temporary generators by 21 October, several remained in situ but disconnected, in readiness to be transported to their home location in the east of NSW.



2. Supplementary Questions

This second section contains our responses to the supplementary questions for witnesses, as received by Telstra on 20 March, 2025.

1. Further to the evidence provided at the public hearing on 6 March 2025:

a. What is the range of time that an automatic backup generator (or standalone power system) will provide power to enable operation of a Telstra mobile site?

Telstra maintains a minimum of 24 hours' fuel reserve for backup generators, with refuelling regimes in place for extended mains power outages. A larger reserve is maintained for standalone power systems and select strategic sites.

b. What is Telstra's site upgrade plans in the Far West? In particular:

i. What is the timeframe for Telstra mobile sites in the Far West to be upgraded with a "standalone power system" or automatic generator?

Telstra has no further plans (beyond projects that are already in progress) to augment our stand-alone sites with new SAPS or automatic (permanent) generator capabilities. We will continue to consider future opportunities and to participate in Government funded network "hardening" (resiliency) programs, as they occur.

Telstra undertakes periodic planned programs that ensure the existing backup (battery) systems perform to their design standards. Currently in the region: 26 backup power systems are within design tolerances; 1 power system (Lower Cobham) is currently being assessed for lifecycle replacement; and 1 power system (Thackaringa) had battery lifecycle replacement recently completed (March 2025).

ii. Are any works proposed at the Telstra mobile site servicing White Cliffs including installation of an automatic generator or standalone power system?

No. Current battery reserves of around 15 hours at our White Cliffs site provide sufficient time reserves and allow for a reactive generator deployment if required. There is no plan to install a standalone power system or an automatic generator at the White Cliffs site.

c. Has Telstra applied for funding for the Mobile Network Hardening Program to upgrade and improve resilience of its Telstra mobile sites in the Far West?

Telstra has applied for funding for sites across NSW in the current round of the Mobile Network Hardening Program. Applications to the program are commercial in confidence, and if awarded, they will be advised on the Department's website.¹

¹ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/phone/mobile-network-hardening-program>



- 2. Some organisations have reported that portable generators were installed to power telecommunications infrastructure but were then prematurely removed, further interruption network reception.**

Can you please outline how Telstra made decisions about transporting additional generators and how you identified the areas of where they were most needed?

After a major power disruption, it is standard to consider mains power reasonably stable once restored unless informed otherwise. Short outages of up to a few hours may occur, but generally, the supply remains stable after resolving the main issue.

We anticipated the potential for further short-duration outages during this situation (e.g., up to a couple of hours). The battery reserves at our sites are designed to cater for short duration outages, including during those times of high (traffic) load. Therefore, our normal practice is to commence recovering generators. We often face theft of our equipment, especially portable generators, and timely recovery is important. Replacing stolen items is costly and delays readiness for future disaster events that cause network outages.

In the Far West NSW incident, we received no intelligence from Essential Energy (our Transgrid conduit) or through the NSW Telco Authority to advise that this interim solution was not a stable/robust solution, and we followed our standard procedure. Upon being advised that the gas turbine generator failed (after a component caught fire), we re-engaged without hesitation on our own initiative, with the understanding that the turbine, even if repaired, was not a reliable interim solution.

Regarding the second part of this question (identification of areas most in need), we knew we had to support all impacted sites with interim (generator) power. The order in which the sites are supported is based on their hierarchy ranking within the network, which includes prioritising sites that service a higher number of customers, or sites that are an important part of the network and have flow on impacts.

To illustrate with an example, where both a mobile base station and the upstream transmission network are impacted, the upstream transmission network will be prioritised to occur before the mobile base station. This is just an example; the reality is, we dispatch technicians in parallel to the extent we have multiple staff who can be deployed, and they are deployed based on the hierarchical ranking of the sites.

- 3. How was Telstra involved in the emergency response to the Far West electricity outages last year? Did Telstra have a government agency as a point of contact for the response?**

The NSW Telco Authority was our primary operational engagement point within the NSW government for this event. Two-way intelligence was shared across the duration of this event.

In addition, Telstra was also receiving complementary intelligence directly from Essential Energy throughout this event, Essential Energy being our conduit into Transgrid.