

**Submission  
No 4**

**ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR DECISION-MAKING FOR THE DELIVERY  
OF MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE, CONTRACTING OF PUBLIC SERVICES  
AND/OR THE PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Ausgrid

**Date Received:** 30 November 2023

**INQUIRY AREA OF FOCUS:**  
**CRITICAL COMMUNICATIONS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (CCEP)**

30 November 2023



Jason Li, MP  
Chair  
Public Accounts Committee  
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Dear Mr Li, MP

**Ausgrid submission to Public Accounts Committee (the Committee) Inquiry into the accountability measures for decision-making for the delivery of the Critical Communications Enhancement Program (the Inquiry)**

Ausgrid welcomes the opportunity to respond to Committee's invitation to make submissions to the Inquiry. Ausgrid owns and operates a shared distribution grid that stretches from southern Sydney to the Upper Hunter Valley, including the Sydney CBD.

Our network supports over 20 per cent of the national gross domestic product and over 4 million people who live or work within our network area. We see our grid as a shared, open platform, upon which a new ecosystem of products and services will evolve, with interoperability being a key enabler of this. We support the efficient evolution of the energy system in a way that reduces costs across the supply chain, while at the same time providing customers more choice and control.

The Telecommunications Authority consulted with Ausgrid late 2020 and early 2021 regarding the Critical Communications Enhancement Program (**CCEP**). Working level engagement has continued through the Government Radio User Group (**GRUG**). This has provided a high level understanding of the project scope, timing and how the CCEP might impact Ausgrid.

Ausgrid appreciates the opportunity to be involved in future engagement on the CCEP as a key Public Safety Network (**PSN**) stakeholder.

The timing of the CCEP outcomes is important as Ausgrid has significant investment decisions to make in relation to GRN handheld and vehicle units and associated accessories. Changes in CCEP delivery timing impact the timing of our investment.

We use the PSN for day-to-day operation in the Central Coast and Hunter areas of our network, where cellular signal is unreliable or non-existent. The PSN enables these field staff to remain in contact with each other (peer-peer) and our control room so that they can relay vital information from the field and take instructions from the control room to carry out work safely.

During emergencies, when mobile signal can become less reliable, Ausgrid's incident management protocols involve 'failing over' to use the PSN across our entire network for all operational communications as well as to support our Incident Management Team.

Ausgrid also relies on the PSN in multi-agency response scenarios to contact other agencies during emergencies. We regularly participate in emergency training exercises to practice this capability and to use the PSN as a channel of communication. Exercises include 'system black' scenarios when the whole network needs to be restarted in a controlled and systematic fashion requiring communication between various parties.

As such, Ausgrid, and our customers and stakeholders, would benefit from investment in the PSN in our network area, in particular where it will improve coverage and resilience during power outages.

We note that PSN infrastructure is connected to our electricity network, so power outages on our network have the potential to impact the availability of the PSN. In these scenarios we engage with the Telecommunications Authority, as a critical customer, to provide advice on the supply interruption and prioritise supply restoration as soon as possible. However, this level of support is dependent upon Ausgrid knowing about the PSN assets on our network.

With the recent and forecast increase in PSN assets from the CCEP, we will work with the Telecommunications Authority, via its GRUG, to ensure Ausgrid receives updated data on PSN assets in a suitable digital format to enable importation into Ausgrid's Geospatial Information System and Ausgrid's Critical Customer register. We will also work through the GRUG to ensure that any new telecommunications infrastructure introduced as part of this program is designed with suitable solutions for resilience to power supply interruptions (e.g local battery or generation facilities). We plan to raise these considerations with the Telecommunications Authority at the next GRUG meeting.

We thank the Committee for making us aware of the Inquiry and more recent work under the CCEP. We welcome the opportunity to work further with the Telecommunications Authority to engage on the CCEP in the future. If you have any questions about our submission, please contact [REDACTED].

Regards,

[REDACTED]  
Alex McPherson  
Acting Group Executive, Market Development and Strategy