

**Submission  
No 41**

## **THE ELECTRICITY OUTAGES AFFECTING FAR WEST NSW IN OCTOBER 2024**

**Organisation:** NSW Farmers Western Division Council

**Date Received:** 12 February 2025



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Ref: 25400C

11 February 2025

Committee on Environment and Planning  
Legislative Assembly  
NSW Parliament  
Via submissions portal ([environmentplanning@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:environmentplanning@parliament.nsw.gov.au))

Dear Committee

**Re: Submission to Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024**

NSW Farmers Western Division Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to NSW Legislative Assembly's inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024.

NSW Farmers is Australia's largest state farming organisation and advocates for issues such as the environment, biosecurity, water, animal welfare, economics, trade, workforce, and rural affairs. Agriculture is crucial, employing more than 75,000 people in NSW and contributing more than \$24 billion to the economy. Our goal is to reach \$30 billion in output by 2030 by supporting stronger farming businesses. We ensure genuine farmer voices shape policies, and we provide specialist advice, along with valuable member benefits.

NSW Farmers understands that this inquiry will examine the major electricity outages and disruptions in the Far West region in October including preparation, mitigation and response strategies of electricity providers and government agencies. The severe storm that occurred caused the collapse of several transmission towers which led to widespread power outages across Far West NSW. This in turn impacted numerous towns and their surrounding areas including critical telecommunications connectivity. In this failure, issues with the backup generators meant that there were not adequate redundancies in place which then caused the extended power outage.

NSW Farmers recommends the following to this inquiry:

- That the NSW Government prioritise rapid restoration of power and telecommunications infrastructure during natural disasters and other emergency events.
- That the NSW Government advocate for the Federal Government to expedite the introduction of mandatory disaster roaming capability for mobile communications services.
- That the NSW Government ensure that network operators meet obligations to ensure system reliability including redundancy to prevent power outages from occurring.
- That the NSW Government actively consider opportunities to upgrade network resilience and reliability including through investment and support for community-owned microgrids.

Reliable network and redundancies

Reliable electricity supply is a vital service for all communities, and it is crucial there is adequate redundancies and risk mitigation in place to minimise the likelihood of significant outages occurring. Following such an event,

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it is vital that responses by responsible providers and government agencies are activated both urgently and effectively. This is critical to restore power as quickly as possible to minimise disruptions and ensure the safety and wellbeing of impacted communities. Rapid restoration of electricity, including temporary backup generators, is crucial for keeping essential services operating, such as mobile telecommunications and emergency response systems.

After the transmission towers collapsed, the generators failed in their role as a backup supply of power. This inquiry should assess whether the network operator, TransGrid, met its network obligations for customers in remote areas. This is particularly important, as repairing damaged infrastructure in rural and remote areas regularly takes longer due to the distance and logistics involved. The Government must ensure that power companies uphold a standard of service comparable to that provided to metropolitan areas, without imposing unreasonable increases in charges.

Some NSW Farmer members in the Far West have reported poor communications from TransGrid during the outage, including receiving conflicting information via text daily. Farmers were left stopping and starting their own private backup generators as text messages were sent indicating a return to normal power – but then power would drop out again. This continued for several weeks even after the new back-up generators were online. Communication was also sent out daily to some farmers requesting they turn off their rooftop solar, as the grid could not handle the additional power while the backup generator was operating which suggests the energy system is not fit for purpose.

The findings of IPART's investigation into the tower failures and power outages will be critical to determine whether any breach of the network operators license occurred including obligations for system reliability standards and availability of redundancy in system. It will be important that Government respond accordingly if regulatory shortcomings or non-compliance are identified to ensure that appropriate penalties, checks and balances are in place to prevent future events causing significant disruption and distress to rural communities.

Greater electricity network resilience at the local level is critical to ensure business continuity, certainty and vital telecommunications particularly in remote areas. For example, there are many renewable energy generation sources around Broken Hill; however, NSW Farmers understands there was no plan or system to utilise these power sources to act as a back-up despite significant generation capacity locally.

As such this inquiry should consider additional opportunities to upgrade network resilience and reliability through Government support and planning for community-owned microgrids. For example, small-scale, independent electrical systems on farm that can be available as microgrids to locally generate and supply power to local areas, for example following natural disasters where network infrastructure has been damaged.

### Telecommunications

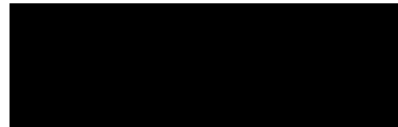
In the absence of power and telecommunications connectivity, residents and farming businesses face heightened risks particularly from a lack of emergency communication. Mobile towers rely very heavily on a stable electricity supply from the grid to maintain their operations. When power outages occur, these towers are rendered inoperable, leaving communities - especially those in remote or rural areas - disconnected and vulnerable. This disruption can be particularly dangerous during emergencies, as the lack of communication hampers the ability to make emergency calls, receive critical information, or access support, essential services and safety information. For very remote communities, where distances are vast and resources limited, the risk of isolation is significantly heightened during power outages. Other concerns from members during power outages extend to medical equipment that relies on power to function and medical devices that rely on mobile connection for functionality and to transmit data. Effective and coordinated responses by first responders similarly rely on reliable connectivity. The faster power is restored, or temporary alternatives are put in place, the quicker impacts to communities are reduced and residents have access to important lifelines including telecommunications. State and Federal Governments must invest in systems that ensure adequate backup power redundancies for mobile towers to provide greater assurances for continued operation when the main network goes offline.

Additionally, NSW Farmers strongly supports the urgent introduction of emergency roaming or Temporary Disaster Roaming (TDR) to provide a safeguard for communications in the event of mobile service disruption. The 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review has recommended that Government mandate emergency mobile roaming during disasters and expedite the regulatory and operation framework needed for its use. TDR would allow mobile users to switch to a different network when their primary carrier's service is down, helping ensure that devices remain connected to operational towers where there are other providers in an area. Whilst work has been done to progress technical feasibility, implementation of this critical measure must be expedited to ensure public safety. Continued support and advocacy by the NSW Government for the introduction of mobile roaming capabilities to support communications in disaster events in addition to other measures to enhance the resilience of emergency service organisations and community connectivity during these responses is essential.<sup>1</sup>

NSW Farmers reiterates the importance of the NSW Government prioritising the rapid restoration of power and telecommunications during natural disasters and other emergencies. Should you wish to discuss this submission further, please contact NSW Farmers Policy Director – Socio Economics, Elen Welch via email [REDACTED] or phone ([REDACTED]).

Yours sincerely

Xavier Martin  
**President**



Gerard Glover  
**Chair – Western Division Council**

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Government submission to 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review - June 2024; NSW Government Submission to ACCC Regional Mobile Infrastructure Inquiry - August 2022.