

Vicki Brady
Chief Executive Officer



8 March 2024

Hon Stephen Dawson MP
Minister for Emergency Services

By email: Minister.Dawson@dpc.wa.gov.au

CC: Michelle.Rowland.MP@aph.gov.au, Minister.Whitby@dpc.wa.gov.au, Mia.Davies@mp.wa.gov.au

Dear Minister Dawson

Thank you for your correspondence, received in my office 13 February 2024, regarding the storm event and power outages which impacted a wide area of the Wheatbelt and Goldfields regions in January.

Telstra recognises how vital mobile connectivity is to all Australians, particularly in regional areas, and I understand the frustrations of those customers who experienced outages of telecommunications and utilities as a result of this extreme weather event.

Like many Australian businesses, Telstra relies on mains electricity to power our network and provide service to our customers. When mains power fails, on-site battery back-up systems are our first fallback to keep sites on air in the event of an outage. Due to the type of equipment required, mobile base stations are extremely power hungry, so these battery power supplies can be drained relatively quickly. The battery capacity at each site will vary depending on location and site requirements, but generally will provide a few hours of coverage – in most cases enough time for a technician to arrive with a generator or for mains power to be restored. While all Telstra mobile sites are equipped with these on-site battery back-up systems, these systems are not capable of sustaining network sites through a prolonged multi-day power outage as we experienced in January. At its peak this event saw more than 180 Telstra sites lose access to mains power, necessitating a major logistical operation on the part of our field teams who worked tirelessly to repair damaged infrastructure and deploy portable generators to impacted network sites across region as quickly possible.

The efforts of our field technicians were aided by the professional and collaborative approach of the emergency services personnel and Western Power crews on the ground, and I commend them for their efforts in difficult conditions.

Telstra is continuing to invest in a range of solutions to improve the resilience of our network, including rolling battery replacement programs, battery upgrades, and the ongoing trial of Automatic Transfer Units (formerly known as Automatic Transfer Switches). Annually, Telstra's infrastructure division InfraCo invests approximately \$40 million on batteries, replacing around one-seventh of our battery fleet each year to ensure optimal performance.

We are also grateful for the ongoing support of the Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments as we expand the coverage and resilience of our mobile network through various co-investment programs. Under the

first two rounds of the Commonwealth's Mobile Network Hardening Program Telstra is upgrading more than 100 base stations across Western Australia to a minimum 12-hour battery back-up to improve the resilience of the mobile network during mains power outages. Under the same program we have acquired an additional 20 portable generators in Western Australia – many of which were deployed to sites during the January storm event – which have been strategically pre-positioned at key locations around the state.

Telstra is committed to providing high quality services to regional communities, and I welcome the opportunity to continue our collaboration with the Federal and State Governments on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicki Brady', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vicki Brady
Chief Executive Officer