



Require a minimum of 24 hours backup power for critical phone towers in bushfire-prone areas	
Party:	Independent Member for Indi
<p>Summary of proposal:</p> <p>The proposal would require Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to install a minimum of 24-hours power backup at all mobile base stations servicing high bushfire risk zones.</p> <p>The upgrades would be co-funded through the existing Mobile Network Hardening program.</p> <p>The proposal would start from 1 July 2025.</p>	
<p>Additional information (based of further advice provided):</p> <p>Upgrades must be completed by 30 June 2028.</p>	

Costing overview

The proposal would be expected to decrease the fiscal and underlying cash balances by around \$4.2 million over the 2025-26 Budget forward estimates period (see Table 1). This impact reflects departmental expenses for oversight of the upgrade pipeline.

The proposal would not be expected to have an impact beyond the 2025-26 Budget forward estimates period, other than for Public Debt Interest (PDI) impacts. A breakdown of the financial implications (including separate PDI tables) over the period to 2035-36 is provided at Attachment A.

Table 1: Require a minimum of 24 hours backup power for critical phone towers in bushfire-prone areas – Financial implications (\$m)^{(a)(b)}

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total to 2028-29
Fiscal balance	-2.0	-1.1	-1.1	-	-4.2
Underlying cash balance	-2.0	-1.1	-1.1	-	-4.2

(a) A positive number represents an increase in the relevant budget balance; a negative number represents a decrease.

(b) PDI impacts are not included in the totals.

- Indicates nil.

Uncertainties

The financial impacts of this costing are uncertain due to data limitations, and sensitive to assumptions around the number of mobile network sites covered by the policy, any overlap with existing battery backup at those sites, and availability of suitable battery storage and installation services.

As no new Commonwealth funding or co-funding proportion has been specified, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) has only estimated the cost of departmental oversight of the mobile base station upgrade pipeline. Existing resources of the Mobile Network Hardening program are not expected to sufficiently cover any material upgrade costs, beyond the existing scope of that program.

The PBO estimates the total cost of upgrades at approximately \$600 million over the 2025-26 Budget forward estimates period. Accordingly, if the Commonwealth was to contribute 25% or 50% of upgrade costs, the policy would be expected to decrease the fiscal and underlying balances by around \$150 million or \$300 million, respectively.

Key assumptions

The PBO has made the following assumptions in costing this proposal.

- There would be approximately 29,000 mobile network sites around Australia in operation by the end of 2027-28.
 - This reflects approximately 27,000 sites reported in the 2024 ACCC Mobile Network Infrastructure report, with an annual growth rate of 3%, based on the net increase in sites between 2023 and 2024.
- Approximately 10% of mobile network sites are in areas at high risk of bushfire.
 - This reflects the proportion of current New South Wales and South Australian sites from the 2024 ACCC Mobile Network Infrastructure report that fall within either category 1 (high risk) of the NSW Government Bush Fire Prone Land map or the Government of South Australia high bushfire risk planning overlay. The PBO has assumed that other states and territories would be proportionally similar.
- Based on the above, approximately 3,200 mobile network sites would be required to undergo upgrades over the period.
- Upgrades to existing sites would be split evenly over the 3-year window. Upgrades to new sites would occur during initial construction.
- Mobile Network Operators who co-locate on individual towers would reach agreements with one another to cover the proportion of upgrade costs not met through the Commonwealth co-funding arrangement.
- Each site would have an average of 7 hours of existing battery backup. This means that each site would require approximately 17 hours of additional battery backup.
 - This calculation is based on assumptions that approximately 80% of sites would have an existing backup of between 3 to 8 hours, and approximately 20% of sites would have an existing backup of 12 hours. These assumptions are informed by the historical outcomes and program guidelines of the Mobile Network Hardening Program.
- The total cost of installing 17 hours of additional battery backup would be approximately \$200,000 in 2025-26 for an average site and would be assumed to grow in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
 - This cost is based on the average grant provided to 18 sites in the Northern Territory during round 2 of the Mobile Network Hardening Program, which provided up to 75% of capital costs for sites in remote areas for 12-hour battery backup, up from 3 hours. This grant amount was uplifted by the Commonwealth contribution amount to capture costs and then used on a cost per hour basis to estimate the cost of 17 hours of storage.
- Departmental costs for oversight would be approximately 0.5% of the total cost of site upgrades, informed by costs from the Mobile Network Hardening Program, and doubled in the first year to include setup costs. This provides approximately \$1,000 per site for compliance.

Methodology

Departmental costs for oversight and compliance were estimated based on the total cost of upgrades undertaken each year, calculated by multiplying the number of sites expected to undertake upgrades each year by the estimated cost of upgrades per site in that year, as per *Key assumptions*.

Financial implications were rounded consistent with the PBO's rounding rules.¹

Data sources

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) [States and Territories Digital Boundary Files](#), ABS Website, accessed 25 May 2025.

Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (2024) [Mobile Infrastructure Report 2024](#), ACCC Website, accessed 25 May 2025.

Commonwealth of Australia (2025) *Pre-election Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025*, Commonwealth of Australia.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, [Mobile Network Hardening Program](#), DITRDCA Website, accessed 25 May 2025.

Government of South Australia Department for Housing and Urban Development (2024) [Planning and Design Code Overlays](#), Data SA, accessed 25 May 2025.

NSW Rural Fire Service (2025) [NSW Bush Fire Prone Land](#), SEED Portal, accessed 25 May 2025.

¹ <https://www.pbo.gov.au/for-parliamentarians/how-we-analyse/pbo-rounding-rules>

Attachment A – Require a minimum of 24 hours backup power for critical phone towers in bushfire-prone areas – Financial implications

Table A1: Require a minimum of 24 hours backup power for critical phone towers in bushfire-prone areas – Fiscal and underlying cash balances (\$m)^(a)

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36	Total to 2028-29	Total to 2035-36
Expenses													
<i>Departmental</i>													
<i>Departmental oversight</i>	-2.0	-1.1	-1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-4.2	-4.2
Total (excluding PDI)	-2.0	-1.1	-1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-4.2	-4.2

- (a) A positive number for the fiscal balance indicates an increase in revenue or a decrease in expenses or net capital investment in accrual terms. A negative number for the fiscal balance indicates a decrease in revenue or an increase in expenses or net capital investment in accrual terms. A positive number for the underlying cash balance indicates an increase in receipts or a decrease in payments or net capital investment in cash terms. A negative number for the underlying cash balance indicates a decrease in receipts or an increase in payments or net capital investment in cash terms.
- Indicates nil.

Table A2: Require a minimum of 24 hours backup power for critical phone towers in bushfire-prone areas – Memorandum item: Public Debt Interest (PDI) impacts – Fiscal and underlying cash balances (\$m)^{(a)(b)}

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36	Total to 2028-29	Total to 2035-36
<i>Fiscal balance</i>	..	-0.1	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3	-0.3	-0.5	-2.1
<i>Underlying cash balance</i>	..	-0.1	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3	-0.3	-0.5	-2.1

- (a) As this table is presented as a memorandum item, these figures are not reflected in the totals above. This is consistent with the approach taken in the budget where the budget impact of most measures is presented excluding the impact on PDI. If the reader would like a complete picture of the total aggregate, then these figures would need to be added to the figures above. For further information on government borrowing and financing please refer to the PBO's online budget glossary².
- (b) A positive number for the fiscal balance indicates an increase in revenue or a decrease in expenses or net capital investment in accrual terms. A negative number for the fiscal balance indicates a decrease in revenue or an increase in expenses or net capital investment in accrual terms. A positive number for the underlying cash balance indicates an increase in receipts or a decrease in payments or net capital investment in cash terms. A negative number for the underlying cash balance indicates a decrease in receipts or an increase in payments or net capital investment in cash terms.
- .. Not zero but rounded to zero.

² [Online budget glossary – Parliamentary Budget Office \(pbo.gov.au\)](https://pbo.gov.au)