Australian Government

Statement by the Minister for Communications, the Hon Anika Wells, MP

Temporary Disaster Roaming Industry Arrangements

29 October 2026

Section 158A of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999*, which was created by the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Act 2026*, requires the Minister for Communications to table a statement in both Houses of Parliament, by 31 October 2026, setting out industry arrangements for the provision of Temporary Disaster Roaming (TDR). This is required if the Minister considers that there are sufficient industry arrangements for TDR.

I have considered the current TDR arrangements established by Australia's mobile network operators, as required by s158 (1), and am satisfied industry's initial provision of TDR in Australia is sufficient.

TDR commenced on 1 October 2026 under an initial operating model for the 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season (HRWS). Industry advise these arrangements balance providing additional connectivity to affected communities with the need to maintain the safe and reliable operation of surviving mobile networks.

Preserving access to Triple Zero remains the highest priority during emergencies, noting customers can already roam when dialling Triple Zero, regardless of whether TDR is operational. TDR complements existing emergency communications systems and broader disaster response arrangements. The industry arrangements include safeguards to make sure activating TDR, does not reduce coverage through overwhelming existing networks.

Industry has provided assurance that TDR is ready to be activated when appropriate. Participating mobile network operators have extensively tested TDR to ensure the capability and safeguards provide for safe, secure and reliable network arrangements.

In reaching my decision that these arrangements are satisfactory, I considered information provided by participating carriers regarding operational capability, governance arrangements, communication channels and escalation pathways. I also noted industry's commitment to information sharing with jurisdictions and the Australian Government, and ongoing work to ensure that, following this initial provision of TDR, the provision of operational prioritisation by jurisdictions is considered during significant national disasters. I have enclosed a letter from the Australian Telecommunications Alliance which provides further detail setting out industry's arrangements that are in place for TDR.

Together with established escalation and coordination arrangements, these arrangements provide the Government with situational awareness and confidence in the governance of the capability.

TDR is active now. The capability will continue to improve based on learnings from its initial operation in this HRWS. Providing Australians with reliable means to communicate when they need it most remains the focus and commitment of the Australian Government.

Australian Telecommunications Alliance

Setting The Standard.
Driving Progress.

23 October 2026

Ms Lisa La Rance
First Assistant Secretary
Communications Services and Systems Division
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Via email: [redacted]

Dear Ms La Rance,

Temporary Disaster Roaming: Industry arrangements for the 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season

Thank you for your letter of 29 September 2026 regarding Temporary Disaster Roaming (TDR) and acknowledgement of the interim operating arrangements for the 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season.

TDR commenced on 1 October 2026 under industry's interim operating protocol, reflecting the commitment of mobile network operators (MNOs) and the Australian Telecommunications Alliance (ATA) to have the capability operational for the 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season.

The recent passage of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2026 provides an important statutory context. New section 158A of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999* (TCPSS Act) addresses whether **sufficient industry arrangements are in place for the provision of temporary disaster roaming in Australia**. Industry considers the arrangements that are in place and supported the commencement of TDR from 1 October 2026 are sufficient for the purposes of section 158A(1).

The ATA welcomes the Department's confirmation that TDR is an industry-led capability, and that operational decisions remain the responsibility of MNOs. Consistent with this position, MNOs have established a TDR protocol covering activation and deactivation; extensions; technical, safety and operational limits; competing demands; and notification and information-sharing arrangements.

These arrangements enable TDR to support mobile connectivity during natural disasters where a customer's usual mobile network is unavailable, subject to the safeguards necessary for the safe, secure, and reliable operation of participating mobile networks. They also cover situations in locations where Telstra is the only MNO.

The ATA and MNOs support continued consideration of longer-term coordination arrangements, including the potential role of a single national coordinating body. That work is intended to build on and further strengthen the industry arrangements already in place, rather than being necessary to the effective operation of TDR under the current protocol.

We respond below to the specific matters raised in your letter.

1. **Visibility and information sharing**

MNOs will notify relevant jurisdictional contacts of TDR activations and deactivations as part of their business as usual reporting on mass service disruptions, network impacts, significant service issues and restoration. The Department's outage notifications mailbox and NEMA's National Situation Room will be copied on relevant notifications. In situations where TDR is activated in Telstra only coverage areas with no network impacts, Telstra will send a bespoke notification to relevant jurisdictional contacts, the

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Department, and NEMA's National Situation Room. These notification arrangements reflect the approach subsequently discussed and agreed between industry, the Department, and NEMA.

These arrangements provide government and relevant Emergency Service Organisations (ESOs) with sufficient visibility of TDR operations without creating a separate or duplicative TDR-specific government reporting framework.

To provide consolidated visibility of TDR activity without imposing additional reporting during an active disaster response, MNOs will provide a summary of TDR activations, deactivations, and extensions at the end of each season.

2. Significant operational decisions

TDR activation, deactivation, extension, and other operational decisions remain the responsibility of MNOs. MNOs remain responsible for complying with applicable laws and regulatory obligations regardless of whether TDR is active and, in making operational decisions, will continue to prioritise the stability and integrity of their networks, and avoid further disruption or adverse impacts on communications services.

Where relevant, TDR notifications may include high-level context on the capability's operation, and the factors informing its activation, deactivation, or extension. This information is provided solely to support situational awareness for government and relevant ESOs. **It does not confer on government any decision-making, oversight, or approval role, and TDR operational decisions do not require government consultation, endorsement, or approval.**

This reflects the Department's acknowledgement that it does not have the operational situational awareness of emergency services, or the network visibility held by MNOs, and does not intend to assume an operational role in TDR activations.

3. Managing competing demands and operational limits

Participating MNOs operate TDR within agreed operational guardrails designed to protect the integrity of surviving networks, with maintaining access to Triple Zero services as the foremost priority. Detailed operational processes, limit, and escalation arrangements are set out in the TDR protocol.

Decisions concerning competing activation requests are managed by participating MNOs in accordance with these arrangements and the operational responsibilities outlined above.

4. Stakeholder information and briefings

The ATA and the MNOs have undertaken extensive stakeholder engagement and public communications on TDR and the industry operating arrangements. This has included engagement with State and Territory ministers and ESOs, the ACCC, the ACMA, Commonwealth and State and Territory parliamentarians, and consumer groups. There is a planned briefing with small business groups being held within the next week. MNOs have also published information about TDR on their websites.

This engagement supports a consistent understanding of TDR's purpose, the circumstances in which it may be activated, the respective roles of MNOs and ESOs, and the capability's operational limitations. Industry's broader communications approach has also been discussed and shared with the Department.

The ATA will continue to make information about TDR available through its website as a central source for stakeholders and the broader community. These information and engagement activities support transparency, but remain separate from TDR operational decision-making.

5. Learning from the 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season

The 2026-27 High Risk Weather Season will be the first season of TDR operation and will provide practical experience to inform ongoing refinement of the capability. Following the season, industry will review relevant operational experience, lessons learned, and stakeholder feedback, and will continue to engage constructively and collaboratively with the Department, NEMA, and jurisdictions as part of that process.

Industry arrangements

Taken together, the arrangements described above establish an operational industry framework for the provision of TDR that has been in place since 1 October 2026. These arrangements comprise:

- Arrangements between participating MNOs for TDR activation, operation, extension, and deactivation;
- Technical and operational safeguards;
- Arrangements for managing competing demands and escalation between participating MNOs;
- Agreed notification arrangements providing visibility to government, NEMA, and relevant jurisdictional stakeholders;
- Established MNO reporting arrangements for broader mass service disruptions;
- Stakeholder information and engagement led by the ATA and MNOs; and
- An industry-led post-season review.

Industry considers that, taken together, these constitute sufficient industry arrangements for the provision of temporary disaster roaming in Australia for the purposes of section 158A(1) of the TCPSS Act. Accordingly, industry considers that the circumstances requiring the Minister to make a determination establishing a temporary disaster roaming framework under section 158A(1) do not arise.

The inaugural High Risk Weather Season will provide valuable operational experience to inform further refinement of TDR. Continuous improvement of the capability does not detract from industry's position that sufficient arrangements are already in place. The ATA and MNOs remain committed to the effective operation of TDR, and constructive engagement with government and ESOs throughout the season.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Luke Coleman

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Telecommunications Alliance