
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Phoning home

Inquiry into international mobile roaming

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Communications

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Canberra

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Foreword

There can be no doubt about the utility of international mobile roaming, a service that allows you to use your own phone and phone number wherever you are in the world.

The utility of roaming was recognised by many of the participants to the inquiry. The Consumers' Telecommunications Network said the following at the public hearing in Sydney on 28 November 2008:

...the expectation these days is to be able to be contacted. People want to take their phones with them, but they do not want to do that at the expense of getting a shock when they come back.

As is clear from this statement, roaming is also known for its cost. During the inquiry, the Committee was confronted with evidence of international mobile roaming bills in the tens of thousands of dollars.

The Committee found that there were two apparent reasons for the high cost of mobile roaming.

The first has to do with how costs are attributed. Roaming is supported by a complex technical treatment of calls to and from roamed phones. This treatment means that the cost of making and receiving calls is higher for roamed calls.

The most obvious example of this is the approach to receiving calls. In the regular use of mobile phones, the recipient of a call is not charged. However, if the recipient is using roaming, they will be charged for the international leg of any calls they receive.

To enhance consumer understanding of roaming costs, the Committee recommends that the:

- Australian Communications and Media Authority facilitate a meeting of the Communications Alliance to discuss the development of a minimum standard for consumer information and awareness on roaming and potential costs; and

- Australian Government explore opportunities to collaborate with the Australian Telecommunications Users Group's 'Roam Fair' campaign.

The second apparent reason has to do with the power of Australian providers in negotiations with overseas providers over the provision of roaming services. Australian providers do not appear to have the customer base to negotiate competitive prices for roaming services.

The Committee believes this situation is best overcome through a policy of regulating the framework for the wholesale cost of roaming through bilateral and multilateral negotiations with other countries, ensuring that countries with the largest number of Australian visitors are given priority.

In an effort to improve competition between Australian providers, the Committee recommends that the Australian Communications and Media Authority develop, through the Communications Alliance, an amendment to the *Code on mobile number portability* to allow temporary mobile number portability for roaming services.

While there are a number of other ways in which travellers can remain in touch, none of these has the utility of roaming. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that with careful planning most travellers can find an alternative that offers some of the utility of roaming at less cost.

In order to ensure travellers are aware of the alternatives, the Committee has recommended they be incorporated into information on roaming provided by the Australian Government.

Ms Belinda Neal MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair Ms Belinda Neal MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Mark Vaile MP (untill 26/8/08)

Mrs Kay Hull MP (from 26/8/08)

Members The Hon Bruce Billson MP

Mr David Bradbury MP

Ms Julie Collins MP

Mr Steve Georganas MP

Mr Steve Irons MP

The Hon Peter Lindsay MP

Ms Kerry Rea MP

Ms Amanda Rishworth MP

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	Siobhán Leyne (until 8/9/08)
	Russell Chafer (until 21/11/08)
	Jerome Brown (from 24/11/08)
Inquiry Secretary	Kevin Bodel
Research Officers	Geoff Wells
Administrative Officers	Dorota Cooley
	Emma Martin (from 15/9/08 to 18 /12/08)
	Claire Young (from 2/7/08 to 12/9/08)



Terms of reference

The Committee is to inquire into and report on:

- The extent to which retail international mobile roaming charges for both voice and data services reflect the underlying costs to operators of supplying the service.
- The adequacy of information available on Australian mobile operators' international mobile roaming costs and revenue in both retail and wholesale markets.
- The impact of new and emerging technologies and commercial initiatives that may reduce international mobile roaming charges for users or provide a substitute for international mobile roaming services.
- The adequacy of existing information from mobile operators available to consumers concerning international mobile roaming charges for users.



List of abbreviations

ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
AMTA	Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group of nations
ATUG	Australian Telecommunications Users' Group
CTN	Consumers' Telecommunications Network
DBCDE	Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
EC	European Commission
ERG	European Regulators' Group
EU	European Union
GSM	Global System for Mobile
ICN	International Competition Network
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module

SMS	Short Message Service
IOT	Inter Operator Tariff
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol



List of recommendations

4 Regulation of international mobile roaming

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue a policy of regulating the framework for the wholesale cost of roaming through bilateral and multilateral negotiations with other countries, ensuring that countries with the largest number of Australian visitors are given priority.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACCC introduce reporting requirements for international mobile roaming services on Australian providers. In particular, the Committee recommends that cost, revenue and service usage information should be provided.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the:

- Australian Communications and Media Authority facilitate a meeting of the Communications Alliance to discuss the development of a minimum standard for consumer information and awareness of roaming and potential costs; and
- Australian Government explore opportunities to collaborate with the Australian Telecommunications Users Group's 'Roam Fair' campaign.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Communications and Media Authority develop, through the Communications Alliance, an amendment to the *Code on mobile number portability* to allow temporary mobile number portability for roaming services.

5 Alternative services to international mobile roaming

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that when an Australian Government agency provides information to the public on roaming, the alternatives to roaming be included as part of the information. These alternatives should include:

- international calling cards;
- short Message service;
- use of local networks;
- email; and
- use of hotel telephones.

