

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Group 3

Program 1.7

Question No. 145

Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 16 October 2012:

Enhanced location-based emergency alert system

- a) Will Vodafone Hutchison Australia subscribers be in receipt of warning messages through the enhanced system by the 2012/13 disaster season? If not, when will subscribers be able to receive these messages?
- b) Will subscribers still be in receipt of Emergency Alert warnings via the current system based on an individual's billing address?
- c) Is there a possibility of a repeat of the malfunction that was witnessed during the Canberra chemical fire last year?
- d) Will the enhanced system through Telstra be fully operational by the 2012/13 disaster season?
- e) It was relayed by Mr Rothery in the last round of estimates that there were some design changes in the contracted system with Telstra from the initial design used in the feasibility study. It was relayed that further testing of the system was required. Has this testing occurred? As it has been posited that testing would occur during rollout, would there be a possibility that any flaws or errors in the design may lead to confusion amongst subscribers if receiving unexpected errors in messaging?
- f) Will the enhanced system be normative across all three Telcos, or will there be system discrepancies across the service providers which will not allow for a completely synchronised system?
- g) Will there be an overlap between the current system and the enhanced system, i.e. is there a possibility that subscribers may receive multiple warnings?
- h) Where do negotiations currently stand with Optus? Will the enhanced system under Optus be fully operational in time for the 2012/13 disaster season?
- i) How many subscribers are currently clients of Optus, Vodafone and Telstra for the purposes of sending warnings? Provide a breakdown of each Telco..
- j) What is the total cost to the Commonwealth to date for negotiations regarding the enhanced system and any testing etc...?
- k) Would the Department agree that the enhanced system will not be operational across all 3 Telcos in anticipation of the 2012/13 disaster season, even though the Department hoped for finalising with all 3 Telcos and having a fully operational system by this time?

l) Can the Department ensure that testing of the enhanced system will take place prior to the 2012/13 disaster season to ensure minimal operational impact etc...?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a. No. Vodafone Hutchison Australia (VHA) subscribers will receive emergency warnings using the enhancement to Emergency Alert which disseminates warnings based on the last known location of a mobile telephone (location based solution – LBS) to their mobile telephones from November 2013.
- b. Yes. Mobile telephones will continue to receive Emergency Alert warning messages disseminated using the registered service address of subscribers.
- c. Learnings from the Mitchell Hazardous Material Fire were shared with all states and territories at the 11 November 2011 meeting of emergency management ministers. There was not a malfunction of Emergency Alert in the Mitchell Hazardous Material Fire in September 2011. The system was not used in accordance with the Recommended Use Guidelines.
- d. Yes. Telstra mobile telephone subscribers are now able to receive Emergency Alert messages disseminated using the LBS capability.

Emergency Alert's location based capability was used for the first time on 20 November 2012 by the South Australia Country Fire Service to warn over 12,000 Telstra mobile customers on the Eyre Peninsula of approaching bushfires.

- e. Victoria has undertaken significant testing of Telstra's location based solution and the changes made to the Emergency Alert interface have occurred. Final phase testing occurred on 4 November 2012. More than 110,000 SMS test messages were issued across 13 different locations around Victoria.
- f. Mobile telephone subscribers will receive identical emergency warnings when the LBS capability is delivered across the three carriers (Telstra, VHA and Optus).
- g. Yes. Emergency service organisations retain the capacity to send telephone-based emergency warnings to mobile telephones based on their registered service address as well as on the basis of the location of a mobile telephone at the time of an emergency (as well as landlines).
- h. The Victorian Government (on behalf of all states and territories) executed a contract with Optus in September 2012 to deliver LBS warnings from November 2013.
- i. The Australian Communications and Media Authority's *Communications report 2010-11* ascribes the following market share percentages for Australian mobile services (as at June 2011): Telstra 42%, Optus 31%, and VHA 27%. The report identifies that there were approximately 24.49 million mobile phone handset services in Australia at June 2011.
- j. In total, the Commonwealth has contributed close to \$60 million towards the development and enhancement of Emergency Alert, including the LBS enhancement. The location-based enhancement to Emergency Alert is a world-first with no national or international precedent.
- k. Telstra's LBS capability commenced operation in November 2012. Optus and VHA's LBS capabilities will be operational from November 2013. Australian mobile telephone subscribers (across all three carriers' networks) and landlines will continue to receive emergency warnings

disseminated using registered service addresses. A public communications plan is currently being implemented across states and territories, led by Victoria.

1. The Victorian Government, as LBS project lead (on behalf of the states and territories) has advised that testing of the enhanced system occurred prior to the roll out of the LBS.