



MEDIA RELEASE

December 2024

Joint Media Release: CWA of NSW and ICPA-NSW

3G NETWORK CLOSURE LEAVES RURAL AND REMOTE NSW COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING

The recent closure of the 3G network has created a communications crisis in rural and remote communities across NSW. Over the past three weeks, countless residents and businesses have faced significant challenges, including difficulties making mobile calls, sending text messages, accessing the internet, and conducting essential business operations.

Two key advocacy groups—the Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA of NSW), and the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW (ICPA-NSW)—have united to demand immediate action from telecommunications companies and governments to address this worsening situation.

Critical Connectivity Loss

The phased closure of the 3G network was postponed multiple times due to concerns over its potential impact. Despite these delays, the worst fears of rural communities have been realized. Members report being unable to make essential calls, such as those required for business, safety, and emergencies, especially in areas without Wi-Fi coverage. This lack of connectivity has left families, workers, and students dangerously isolated.

“From paddocks to rural roads, where Wi-Fi isn’t an option, many residents simply can’t make the calls they need to,” the organisations stated.

“Basic activities like internet banking, accessing weather updates, and emailing vital business information have become near impossible for some.”

While some distance education students continue to access lessons via NBN connections, the broader community is facing increasing risks due to diminished mobile coverage.

Safety and Disaster Preparedness at Risk

The lack of connectivity has created serious safety concerns. Residents traveling on rural roads cannot rely on mobile coverage to call for help, putting lives at risk. This issue is particularly alarming as communities enter the high-risk disaster season, with the likelihood of storms, bushfires, and floods looming.

“We are deeply concerned that during power outages caused by these disasters, many people won’t be able to make calls—even to 000,” the organisations warned. “This situation is unacceptable and avoidable.”

The reliance on electrically powered communication towers, many of which lack sufficient backup systems, adds to the vulnerability of rural communities during emergencies.

Unanswered Questions and Growing Costs

Despite the closure, many 3G towers across NSW were not upgraded to 4G, leaving large gaps in coverage. The organisations are demanding to know why. Meanwhile, residents are being pushed toward expensive alternatives like Starlink and are forced to invest in costly upgrades to their boosters and extenders to maintain connectivity. For many, this financial burden is untenable, especially given the scale of upgrades required across homes, vehicles, and farm equipment.

ICPA-NSW has long advocated for government rebates to offset these costs. “The transition to 4G has placed an unfair financial burden on rural Australians, and this needs to be urgently addressed,” they said.

“It’s unacceptable that our communities feel as though their communication services have regressed 20 years,” the groups stated. “Reliable connectivity is not a luxury; it’s a basic human right.”

At the recent Federal ICPA conference in Sydney, NSW members demanded the government develop a contingency plan in case 4G fails to meet the needs of rural areas. It is now clear that such a plan is overdue and urgently required.

About Us

CWA of NSW and ICPA-NSW are dedicated to advocating for the rights and wellbeing of rural and remote communities in NSW. Together, we call on the government and telecommunications companies to restore and improve essential connectivity services for those most in need.

For media inquiries, please contact:

- **CWA of NSW: Kylie Galbraith 0411 480 208**
kylie.galbraith@seftons.com.au
- **ICPA-NSW: Tanya Mitchell ICPA-NSW President 0427 724 334**
nswpresident@icpansw.com.au