

COMMUNICATIONS DAY

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ACCC warns UOMO settings could distort D2D competition

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has warned that the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation must be designed carefully to avoid distorting the emerging direct-to-device market or weakening long-term infrastructure competition.

ACCC chair Anna Brakey told the CommsDay Summit that while there was strong support for policies to improve regional mobile coverage, including UOMO, the market for direct-to-device services was still developing, with competitive dynamics, business models and future market structure remaining uncertain.

“Our view is that policy and regulatory settings should be right sized and support conditions where competitive pressure can emerge and develop over time,” Brakey said. “That includes supporting the potential for multiple providers to participate and for infrastructure-based competition to develop where possible.”

She said timing was an important part of that issue, noting some stakeholders had raised concerns about the proposed commencement timing for the UOMO framework and its interaction with emerging direct-to-device markets.

Brakey noted that the bill gave the minister flexibility to adjust the commencement date “having regard to market conditions, including the availability of wholesale services.”

“Ultimately, these are decisions for government, but from the ACCC’s perspective, maintaining focus on long-term competitive outcomes while enabling the benefits of improved coverage to be realised for consumers will be important,” she said.

Brakey said direct-to-device services offered “transformative opportunities” for regional and remote coverage, but also introduced uncertainties around device compatibility, pricing models and the interaction between satellite-based services and existing terrestrial mobile networks.

She also warned that if direct-to-device services became the main means by which mobile operators provided connectivity in hard-to-serve areas, they could weaken incentives to expand or maintain terrestrial mobile infrastructure.



Anna Brakey

“This is a risk if direct-to-device does not provide comparable services and cannot meet the needs of consumers in the way that terrestrial networks do,” Brakey said. “That is a risk we need to watch closely.”

Brakey said the experience of the 3G shutdown had shown how disruptive technology transitions could become when consumers faced uncertainty around device compatibility, coverage, quality outcomes or migration pathways.

The direct-to-device debate is occurring alongside growing interest in the 2GHz band from both satellite operators and mobile network operators.

“In practical terms, there may only be capacity for around two viable providers in this band,” she said. “That constraint is already driving divergent views within the industry — including whether the ACMA should allocate the spectrum administratively with conditions, or through an auction.”

For the ACCC, Brakey said the broader question was how spectrum settings influenced competition and market structure.

“In particular, whether these emerging services develop in ways that support competitive pressure, investment and consumer choice over the longer term. These are important considerations because decisions made early in the development of a market can have long-lasting effects on how that market evolves.”

Brakey said the ACCC had not yet formed a view on how the spectrum should be allocated and would consider the issue further if the Australian Communications and Media Authority sought its advice.

The ACCC chair placed the UOMO debate in the context of rapid change in satellite and mobile markets. She said the emergence of direct-to-device services, the uptake of Starlink and the broader growth of low earth orbit satellite technology were driving significant change in the communications sector.

Starlink had become Australia’s second-largest network providing broadband services after NBN Co, according to data gathered by the ACCC. Brakey said Starlink’s retail subscriber base grew from 375,000 in June 2025 to 552,000 in December 2025. Low earth orbit satellite technology could deliver new wholesale products for retailers, but market participants could also face increasing competitive pressure from vertically integrated global providers operating across infrastructure, wholesale and retail layers, she said.

Brakey said the technology raised questions around its interaction with fixed wireless and other satellite networks, the degree of infrastructure competition that would emerge, how consumer choice would evolve over time and the impact on long-term investment incentives. “They also raise a more direct question,” Brakey said. “To what extent do LEO satellite services begin to act as a competitive constraint on the NBN — particularly in areas where consumers are actively choosing satellite over fixed wireless or satellite NBN products?”

Brakey also noted renewed interest in domestic mobile roaming, with significant changes since the ACCC last considered the issue in 2017. Those changes included the shutdown of 2G and 3G networks, the rollout of 5G, the Vodafone-TPG merger and the Optus-TPG regional sharing agreement. “The ACCC continues to assess the evolving market in considering whether any regulatory intervention is necessary,” she said.

Rohan Pearce

TPG CTO warns UOMO risks locking in cost and dependency

TPG Telecom chief technology officer Giovanni Chiarelli has warned the federal government's Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation risks locking in poor consumer, competition and investment outcomes unless satellite providers are brought within the regulatory framework.

In a CommsDay Summit 2026 speech, Chiarelli said the convergence of terrestrial mobile networks and satellites had made UOMO possible, but warned that the current approach left mobile network operators carrying obligations for a satellite layer they did not control.

"There is still no clarity on who will pay for it, and how it will be funded," Chiarelli said. "We are facing legislative and timeline lock-in before both technology and regulatory settings are ready."

He said direct-to-device satellite technology was promising but provider readiness, device compatibility and spectrum access were "not yet settled."

"As things stand today, the weight of UOMO obligations sits entirely on the shoulders of mobile network operators, even though those operators do not control the satellite layer that is critical to delivery," he said.

"Satellite providers, by contrast, currently sit outside the proposed UOMO laws and have no stake in ensuring the policy objectives are met."

Chiarelli said the policy objective behind UOMO was right and could deliver significant benefits, including improved safety outcomes in regional Australia and the closure of some of the most difficult remaining coverage gaps.

However, he said Australia was seeking to legislate the service before the relevant technology had launched at scale, rather than allowing the technology to become available and then enabling commercial agreements.

"Australia's approach to legislating this service rather than allowing the technology to launch when available so parties can contract under commercially negotiated terms is a world first," he said.

Chiarelli said there was currently "not a single satellite service" able to deliver the benefits promised by UOMO because carrier-grade, voice-capable satellite constellations were not yet available.

He also said a universal obligation would only work if there was a critical mass of compatible devices in market, adding that there was currently "no device supporting direct-to-device carrier-grade voice."

The TPG executive said the broader regulatory framework had been designed for a terrestrial-only era and regional funding programs had been created to solve different problems.



Giovanni Chiarelli

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EDISONS AWARDS 2026 FINALISTS BY CATEGORY



Best telecom marketing initiative

WINNER: SUBCO for SMAP “radical transparency” campaign

FINALISTS: Dicker Data for Telco Solutions division launch, Megaport for 1000 sites campaign, Superloop for Exetel One plan, Telstra Business for Tame Your Tech campaign, Telstra InfraCo for Aura Network launch

Best sustainability initiative

WINNER: NBN Co for reduction of carbon footprint

FINALISTS: ANDREW for enabling mobile infrastructure sharing, Service Stream for Remote HSE Coach

Best retailer

WINNER: Superloop

FINALISTS: Leaptel, Superloop

Best wholesale telco

WINNER: NBN Co

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Optus Wholesale

FINALISTS: Community Fibre, FibreConX, Isoton, TPG Telecom (ZMobile), Leaptel, Nokia & Optus (Sydney-Perth fibre upgrade), Opticomm, Symbio, Telstra InfraCo

Best fixed network initiative or partnership

WINNER: Vocus for Project Horizon & TPG transaction

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Ventia, SKAO for the SKA-Low telescope infrastructure program

FINALISTS: NBN Co for FTTP Legacy Throughput Test, NBN Co for Accelerate Great, NEXTDC for AXON: Virtual Data Centre Connectivity Platform, Nokia & NBN Co for Supercharging Fibre technical trial, Nokia & Optus for Sydney-Perth fibre upgrade, Superloop for Football Australia partnership, NBN Co, UTS and RMIT for Astrid, Telstra InfraCo for Aura Network, Telstra for Adaptive Networks Centre, Opticomm for FTTP in regional Australia, Redfig Networks for keeping Australia on-air, Ventia/Community Fibre for social housing program, WISPAU, Cambium and Qualcomm for the AFC 6 GHz trial

Best mobile infrastructure provider

WINNER: BAI for Critical Communications Enhancement Program

FINALISTS: Amplitel, BAI for shared infrastructure/Broadcasting Resilience Program, Indara & Waveconn

Best telco AI initiative

WINNER: Amplitel for Project SMaRTER: AI-Driven Tower Fingerprinting

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

SUBCO for Netkraken - Autonomous Network Operations Platform

Optus, Ericsson for 5G link adaptation, prediction

FINALISTS: NBN Co for ASKnbN, OneWiFi for Autonomous Emergency Call Verification Agent, Service Stream & AWS for AI-powered workorder image verification

ation, Superloop for Teddy AI chatbot, Telstra for SmartFix & SmartPath, TPG Telecom for Network Experience Agent, SourceAI for Atlas telco AI in a box platform

Best private/local mobile network initiative or partnership

WINNER: Vocus for Onslow private LTE network

Finalists: Ericsson, Optus & FrontierSI for emergency call location, Nokia, Omnitouch & AIG for Ascension Island network, Nokia, Omnitouch & Norfone for Norfolk Island network, Nokia, TPG for TPG private mobile networks, 2Degrees, Ericsson & Lyttelton Port for South Island port 5G network

Best national mobile network initiative or partnership

WINNER: Telstra for satellite messaging

Finalists: Cyient for live deployment of triple-band FDD Massive MIMO, More, Tangerine and Telstra for Shared Number and eSIM Companion plans, Telstra, Optus, TPG & UTS for emergency call test facility, Telstra, Ericsson for FDD Massive MIMO Initiative, TPG Telecom for MOCN with Optus

HALL OF FAME

Inductee: Paul Fletcher

Paul brought to public life a rare combination of industry experience, policy discipline and parliamentary service. Before entering Parliament, he worked at Optus and served as chief of staff to former communications minister Richard Alston, giving him an unusually practical understanding of the sector long before he became a minister himself.

As communications minister, and in related portfolios covering infrastructure, cities and the arts, Paul brought seriousness and command of detail to complex issues: the NBN, mobile coverage, regional connectivity, online safety, broadcasting and digital infrastructure.

Those who dealt with him knew he read the brief, understood the trade-offs and engaged with the substance. In this industry, where policy decisions involve engineering, economics, competition and public expectations, that mattered.

Paul represented Bradfield for more than 15 years and served in senior roles in government and opposition.

We recognise a substantial contribution to public policy and to Australian communications.



Judges: Michelle Lim (TelSoc), Kevin Bloch (Adviser), Andrew Sheridan (Adviser), Grahame Lynch (CommsDay), Luke Coleman (ATA), Veronica Kennedy-Good (Mindshare), Tony Chan (CommsDay), Rohan Pearce (CommsDay)

Congratulations to all awardees

“Over time, that has left us with what many in this room would recognise as a regulatory mish-mash — a patchwork of obligations, subsidies and levies, often layered on top of each other,” he said.

“If not designed and implemented carefully, UOMO risks becoming another policy that adds regulatory cost — costs that ultimately flow through to the Australian people and businesses our industry supports.”

Chiarelli floated a possible alternative model in which government set a national baseline for outdoor voice and SMS access and used satellite technology to deliver it in uneconomic areas.

Under that model, satellite providers could receive spectrum at very low or zero cost, but only under strict conditions requiring them to offer direct-to-device services on an equitable wholesale basis to all mobile operators, meet defined reliability and coverage standards and provide basic voice and SMS services at zero wholesale cost for UOMO purposes.

“Not because government is ‘giving something away’, but because the public is receiving something concrete in return for the spectrum asset: universal access to essential connectivity,” he said.

He said satellite operators could provide the reach while mobile network operators integrated the capability into their networks and made it available across brands, plans, prepaid and postpaid services, mobile virtual network operators and inbound roamers.

“From a consumer’s point of view, you keep your phone. You keep your provider,” he said. “The critical difference is that when you step outside for coverage — on highways or in remote areas — your phone will work even in areas where no terrestrial network exists.”

OWNERS SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE: Chiarelli said responsibility should follow control. Satellite providers that benefited from access to spectrum should accept service and reliability obligations matching their role, while mobile operators should remain accountable to customers but not carry risks they could not control.

He also pointed to the United States, where AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon had announced plans to create a joint venture focused on direct-to-device satellite connectivity. He said the relevance for Australia was not that the model should be copied directly but that collaboration at the right layer could strengthen competition rather than weaken it.

Chiarelli linked the UOMO debate to spectrum pricing, saying recent spectrum renewal decisions would require mobile operators to collectively pay about \$7.32b to renew existing holdings.

“That is real capital leaving the industry at exactly the same time we are being asked to fund UOMO, invest in direct-to-device capability, harden networks for resilience, fund a no-fault scam compensation scheme, and prepare for the 6G technology cycle, which will also need more spectrum,” he said.

“Every dollar spent on spectrum is a dollar not spent on infrastructure, coverage or resilience.”

He said if government continued to layer new obligations on top of rising spectrum costs without adjusting the broader framework, UOMO risked becoming harder to de-

liver, slower to scale and more expensive than necessary.

“LEOSat services are coming anyway because such transformational technologies will always come to market where there is demand, and it can transform safety, resilience and connectivity across this country,” Chiarelli said.

“By legislating for it the wrong way, we risk locking in cost, complexity and dependency for decades to come.”

Grahame Lynch

Slattery warns Australia lacks sovereign control over subsea cable resilience

SUBCO founder Bevan Slattery has warned that Australia faces a strategic gap in submarine cable resilience, arguing the country lacks sovereign hypercables, survey vessels and cable repair ships at a time when subsea systems are becoming critical to artificial intelligence, cloud infrastructure and national security.

In a CommsDay Summit speech, Slattery said Australia’s emerging “hypercable” environment was being dominated by hyperscalers and foreign-controlled systems, with independently owned Australian capacity only set to emerge with SUBCO’s APX East project.

He said hyperscaler-owned systems were commercially rational from the perspective of their owners, but their primary purpose was to support vertically integrated platforms rather than broader national infrastructure requirements. That created a risk if Australia did not ensure there was independent, contestable and Australian-controlled capacity in the market.

Slattery said the issue would become more acute as older dot-com era cables were retired from service. He said Southern Cross North, Southern Cross South, Endeavour, Australia-Japan Cable and Vocus systems were likely to retire over the next five years, removing around 60,000km of cable from regional maintenance arrangements. That would shift more of the maintenance cost burden onto new systems including SMAP, APX East, Meta’s Waterworth and other new regional cables.

He warned that Australia also lacked the physical capability to survey, install and repair submarine cables independently.

“We don’t have one,” Slattery said, referring to an Australian submarine cable fleet. “We don’t have a survey ship. Our nation waters are being surveyed by foreign organisations. We don’t have a capability.”

Slattery said SUBCO believed Australia needed a drone survey capability by 2027 and a sovereign cable ship by 2030. He said SUBCO would make a decision within 90 days on whether to buy an unmanned surface vessel, potentially for APX East survey work, and wanted one available for Australian survey requirements more broadly.

The larger requirement, he said, was a dedicated cable ship. Slattery said such a



vessel would require an investment of around \$250m and take at least three years to build, meaning a decision was needed by the end of 2026 if Australia wanted capability in place by 2030.

He said SUBCO expected to make a decision by the end of the year and would seek support from the Australian and US governments. Slattery argued the issue was not only an Australian requirement but also relevant to the Pacific, where connectivity and resilience were heavily dependent on submarine cables and satellite systems.

The comments came as Slattery also announced that SUBCO's \$500m SMAP cable had passed provisional acceptance, with the system expected to be configured and ready for service later this month. He said demand had been strong and SUBCO expected its full fibre-pair allocations to be exhausted by the end of the year.

Slattery also confirmed plans for a 180km Tasmanian branch from the SMAP system into George Town. He said the project, underwritten by Firmus, would be Tasmania's first new submarine cable in more than 20 years and would provide the state with more than 60Tbps of new capacity, including its first direct fibre connection to Sydney.

Grahame Lynch

Google takes Telstra Aura capacity, Telstra secures Google subsea fibre pairs

Google will take inter-city dark fibre capacity on Telstra's Aura Network while Telstra will secure fibre pairs on Google-backed Pacific subsea cable systems under a strategic infrastructure partnership aimed at strengthening Australia's cloud, artificial intelligence and international connectivity resilience.

The agreement will see Google use capacity on Telstra's new national fibre backbone, while Telstra will access Google's Pacific Connect and Australia Connect initiatives through subsea fibre pairs on the Tabua, Proa and Bulikula cable systems.

The companies said the arrangement would link Australia with Japan, the Pacific Islands and the United States and provide more resilient terrestrial and subsea routing for cloud and artificial intelligence workloads.

Google said it had selected Telstra and the Aura Network to support its artificial intelligence capabilities in Australia. Telstra said the Google arrangement would give it diverse and secure subsea pathways as data-intensive applications placed greater demands on domestic and international infrastructure.

Google vice president for global infrastructure Bikash Koley said the next wave of artificial intelligence innovation required "deep collaboration and robust physical networks."

"This partnership brings together Google's global subsea capabilities and network innovations and Telstra's terrestrial reach to ensure Australians have the secure, high-capacity and resilient digital services they require to compete globally," he said.

Telstra Digital Infrastructure CEO Steven Worrall said the partnership was about improving national capability and keeping Australia connected to the global economy.

"The Aura Network is the backbone of Australia's digital future; connectivity is its lifeblood," Worrall said.

“With more than 8,000 kilometres already laid across the country and the launch of the Melbourne-Canberra-Sydney coastal routes late last year, the Aura rollout is gathering significant momentum.”

He said Telstra was also securing fibre pairs on high-demand global routes to build “resilient, secure and scalable infrastructure” for the next industrial phase.

The partnership extends the commercial relevance of Telstra’s Aura Network to the hyperscale cloud sector. Telstra has previously described Aura as a \$1.6b strategic investment designed to provide high-capacity inter-capital fibre, with a dual-cable architecture comprising express long-distance paths between capital cities and foundation paths to support connectivity to regional and remote areas.

Telstra last year launched the Melbourne-Canberra-Sydney coastal routes as part of the Aura rollout, with the network previously described as capable of simulated speeds of up to 83.6Tbps over 1,200 kilometres.

For Telstra, the subsea component deepens its relationship with Google in the Pacific. Telstra International previously said it would be one of the key providers for Google’s central Pacific Connect initiative and would own and operate a fibre pair on the Bulikula core trunk connecting Guam and Fiji. It also said it was partnering with Google on Tabua, which was intended to improve path diversity between Guam and Australia via Fiji and other Pacific islands, as well as between the United States and Australia.

Under the new agreement, Telstra will use fibre pairs on Tabua, Proa and Bulikula. The systems form part of Google’s broader regional subsea program, including Pacific Connect and Australia Connect, and are intended to strengthen routes between Australia, the Pacific, Japan and the United States.

The companies said the integration of terrestrial and subsea routes would reduce single points of failure and support continuous, secure data flows for businesses, government services and consumers.

Worrall said the partnership reflected the companies’ shared commitment to Australia and the Pacific at a time when artificial intelligence and data-intensive technologies were reshaping economies.

“Together, we’re building the AI-ready connectivity that enables communities and regions to participate fully in the digital economy — supporting innovation and reinforcing Australia’s role as a regional enabler for cloud, data and AI ecosystems across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond,” he said.

Staff reporter

Telcos must own trust crisis but government must support network investment: ATA

Australian Telecommunications Alliance CEO Luke Coleman has delivered a blunt assessment of the sector’s standing, telling the CommsDay Summit that the industry must accept it has become Australia’s most distrusted sector while also warning that current spectrum and Budget settings do not align with treating mobile networks as critical national infrastructure.

Coleman told the summit that Roy Morgan Research’s Risk Monitor index showed

telecommunications was now more distrusted than social media, gambling, real estate agents, big pharma, oil and gas, politicians and government.

“If you want to know what the bottom looks like, it’s when you’re looking up at casinos and real estate agents for advice on trust,” he said.

He said the position was not the result of one event but a five-year accumulation of major consumer, security and resilience failures, including unconscionable conduct cases, the 2022 Optus cyberattack, the 2023 national Optus outage, the 2024 3G shut-down, the 2025 Triple Zero outage and the rejection of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code.

“Any one of these events on its own would have impacted public trust in the telecoms sector. But the cumulative effect of these events steadily remaining in the public’s consciousness over a five-year period has resulted in us being Australia’s most distrusted sector,” Coleman said.

Coleman said it was a “sobering thought” for the industry and added that the first step to recovery was admitting the problem.

“We have a problem. We are Australia’s most distrusted sector. And the onus is on us, as an industry, to take responsibility for that, to address it, and to turn it around,” he said.

But he also used the speech to sharpen the sector’s argument on mobile investment settings after the recent spectrum renewal process. Coleman said mobile networks were critical national infrastructure and asked whether current policy settings encouraged operators to invest in greater coverage, capacity and resilience.

He said the federal Budget included “no new spending to improve network coverage, capacity, or resilience” while telcos were shortly afterwards handed a \$7.3b bill to retain access to spectrum “they cannot operate without.”

“And this is in an environment where telcos are, on average, not making a return on investment above their cost of capital,” Coleman said. “Consider those facts, and decide for yourself whether we have policy settings that treat mobile networks as critical national infrastructure.”

Coleman said the industry accepted it had to do its part to rebuild trust by delivering the coverage, capacity and reliability Australians expected. But he said if mobile networks were accepted as critical to Australia’s social fabric, government should also have policy settings that supported investment.

Grahame Lynch

Work on new consumer protection standard ‘well advanced’

The Australian Communications and Media Authority is well advanced in drafting a new Telecommunications Consumer Protections Standard and will begin initial consultations in a matter of weeks, with chair Nerida O’Loughlin saying the regulator aimed to have the standard in place later this year.

The move to a TCP Standard in place of the previous industry-developed TCP Code “is not just a technical regulatory change,” O’Loughlin told the CommsDay Summit. “It is an important moment for the sector” and an opportunity to demonstrate a commit-

ment to restoring the industry's reputation, she said.

The ACMA chair said the regulator had for several years been clear with the telco sector about the deficiencies in the TCP Code.

"A standard provides an opportunity to strengthen protections, improve clarity and rebuild confidence in the framework that governs consumer outcomes in the sector," she said.

"The goal should not simply be to create more rules. The goal should be to create rules that are clear, enforceable and directed at the outcomes consumers have a right to expect."

Implementing new industry obligations such as the domestic, family and sexual violence standard required effort and investment, she said, and ACMA recognised that the impact would differ across organisations depending on their size and resources.

"But we should be clear about the alternative," she said. "We have seen that the cost of not having effective consumer protections is also significant... compliance should not be viewed only as a cost centre. It must be a key part of the DNA of the business."

O'Loughlin said results from the major carriers pointed to a market that "remains competitive, cost-conscious and structurally evolving," with the sector moving "into a more stable earnings phase." However, she noted it was "not an easy growth environment."

"While the sector is performing more strongly in financial terms, it is doing so in a context of heightened expectations and increased obligations," O'Loughlin said. "That is the environment in which we work as a regulator. We are conscious of the need to strike the right balance between supporting investment and innovation and ensuring strong consumer outcomes."

"That balance is central to the work we are doing with government on the future policy and regulatory framework."

The work includes efforts to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden, support greater competition and innovation in the market and look ahead to the next generation of connectivity, including initiatives such as the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation.

O'Loughlin also defended the regulator's pricing for spectrum licence renewals. ACMA opted for market-based pricing using international benchmarking with "robust statistical techniques," rather than an auction.

"Spectrum pricing alone should not lead operators to increase prices for consumers," she said. "The aggregate cost of spectrum under the renewal framework is lower than the cost operators face today."

"A fair market price for spectrum is unlikely to dampen investment," she added. "Investment decisions are driven by expected returns. The outlook for mobile services remains strong."

"Diametrically opposing views have framed the valuation through their own



Nerida O'Loughlin

prism,” O’Loughlin said. “It’s either been a ‘cash grab’ or a ‘bargain basement discount’. In reality, it is a fair price to pay to the taxpayer for a national asset that belongs to all Australians.”

Rohan Pearce

Australia facing fibre shortfall, Vocus CEO warns

Vocus CEO Andrés Irlando has warned that Australia lacks sufficient terrestrial fibre to deliver on the nation’s artificial intelligence ambitions, arguing a looming shortfall could raise costs and limit which AI use cases can be supported.

“What will come with that is limitations on the ambitions around AI and increased costs to serve for those use cases that do gain access to that capacity,” he told the CommsDay Summit.

Irlando said Australia was on the precipice of accelerated digital infrastructure demand due to advantages including land, power, economic stability and political stability. However, he said a deep-dive analysis commissioned by Vocus had revealed a pending fibre shortfall, with the critical Sydney-Melbourne route set to be undersupplied by the end of the year.

“Among the things that we believe is that by 2030, the data centre megawatt capacity will triple. AI workloads will drive 70 to 80% of the demand increase for metro networks. It will drive 85 to 95% of the fibre demand increase for inter-capital networks. And that demand increase will create the need for millions of new terrestrial fibre kilometres,” Irlando said.

“What will be required here and now, and over the mid-term, is new terrestrial fibre builds that include thousands of new fibre route kilometres, thousands of fibre pairs, hundreds of terabits of capacity, and networks built to global customers’ global requirements,” he said.

“Today’s global demand for digital infrastructure is unprecedented... In North America, exponential growth for fibre optic networks isn’t something that is coming, it is something that is a reality today as it will increasingly be across the globe over the next five years,” he told the conference.

Irlando also used the conference to announce that Vocus’ WA long-haul cable system, Horizon, was now ready for service.

“It’s 2000 kilometres of new high-capacity fibre from Perth to Port Hedland through the mid-west and the Pilbara,” he said. “It’s the first competitive offering in this part of WA, finally giving customers choice. It’s engineered for resilience.”

The 38Tbps system had a figure-eight design and offered regional compute and edge data services, he said, connecting to data centres and low earth orbit satellite ground stations. The system provided the only direct connection from the Pilbara to



Andres Irlando

Asia, he said.

In the wake of the acquisition of TPG Telecom fibre assets, Vocus was “now Australia’s fastest growing digital infrastructure platform for fibre optic networks,” with 51,000 kilometres of high-capacity sovereign terrestrial fibre from coast to coast, he said.

“The network has been upgraded to 400 gigs, almost 20,000 connected buildings, and 15,000 kilometres of subsea fibre connecting Australia’s east, west, north to Asia, the Pacific, and North America,” Irlando said.

Irlando said Vocus continued to invest in its capabilities, including new executive appointments such as CTO Nikos Katinakis, who joined in early May.

Samira Sarraf

Optus ‘rebuilds’ as it works to win back customer trust

Optus has revealed the scope of its transformation plan as it works to rebuild public trust, with the business undertaking what chief customer officer, consumer, Anthony Shiner described as a “rebuild” of the telco.

Shiner said the program was focused on “strong basics”, reliable connectivity and simpler systems. It includes a strong focus on network and resilience, including in-sourcing around half of its network operations and onshoring key capabilities.

Optus had also kicked off a core modernisation program and was working to embed AI in the way its network runs, including through AI-Ops, optimisation and real-time performance management.

Shiner said Optus had changed the way it responded when things went wrong, with tighter escalation and faster decision-making. It was also creating up to 300 new onshore contact centre roles.

“Sensitive functions, like domestic violence services and billing escalation, have been brought back onshore — where they belong,” Shiner said. “Because when something goes wrong, the experience matters just as much as the fix itself.”

“When trust is damaged, it can’t be restored through words alone,” Shiner said. “It has to be rebuilt with real action and through real changes that customers can see and feel over time.”

He said that as part of the rebuild, Optus had strengthened its leadership across network operations, security, risk and compliance. It had also introduced stronger monitoring of critical services, including Triple Zero.



Anthony Shiner

“We’ve changed how we support customers through incidents by ensuring we have clearer, more proactive communications when it matters most on any platform,” he told the event. “We’ve also taken firm action where there has been misconduct, resetting incentives, separating sales from service, strengthening protections for our customers, particularly those experiencing vulnerability, and including some of our First Nations customers.”

Optus had also invested in retraining frontline staff, addressing root causes, simplifying systems, clarifying accountabilities and strengthening governance.

“We are realistic about the environment we operate in. Telecommunication networks are complex. Outage incidents can and will still occur, but what must be different for us today at Optus is how we respond when they do occur,” Shiner said.

He said the telco sector’s reputation was not where it should be, and acknowledged that Optus had played a role in the situation.

“But trust in the telco sector is not something any one company alone creates on its own or can fix on its own,” he said. The “rising expectations of customers we’ve been talking about — reliability, safety, trust — don’t sit with any provider exclusively. They sit with all of us.”

The Optus executive also used his address to highlight a “tension” between the surge in data consumption and the decline in customer spend in real terms.

“Over the past decade, data usage has increased tenfold across the telecommunication sector but has become 10% smaller as a share of the household budget... That’s great for customers, but let’s not forget we need to remain commercially viable as an industry,” he said.

He said the industry faced a challenge in striking a balance “between quality future-proof products and services and keeping them within reach for the average Australian while ensuring we keep an industry viable.”

Samira Sarraf

Superloop executive says telcos have trained customers not to trust them

Superloop group executive, consumer Mehul Dave has warned that aggressive promotional pricing in telecommunications has unintentionally created a market culture that rewards customers for switching providers rather than staying with them.

“In training the market to switch, we made loyalty difficult. We built a generation of customers who don’t trust us enough to stay,” Dave told the CommsDay Summit yesterday. He said trust had not been broken intentionally but “systematically,” through strategies that telcos had regarded as competitive advantages but which had ultimately pushed prices higher for existing customers while aggressive discounts continued to be used to win new ones.

“This created a comparison-driven buying journey that rewarded switching and punished staying,” Dave said.

He said customers now checked every six months whether they would be better off with another provider.

Dave said the uptake of Exetel One showed customers were seeking something simpler: “clear pricing, no conditions and certainty that the price they signed up for is the price they’ll pay.”

He also said what consumers valued had fundamentally changed but telcos had been slow to adjust.

“For years the conversation was dominated by speed,” Dave said. “Download speed, upload speed, gigabit this, ultra fast. That speed was marketed as a differentiator, splashed across colourful ads. But that is no longer where the market is.”

He said speed was now a baseline expectation. Customer frustration was instead focused on real-world performance, with uptime, latency and consistency becoming key measures.

“Peak speed is a feature,” Dave said. “Reliability is the product.”

Dave said customer growth in the fixed broadband market was not being evenly distributed.

“There’s a myth I want to dispel that this is just about price, that the providers winning are simply the cheapest,” he said.

“Well, that’s not what the data shows. What we see is that the providers gaining share are the ones whose operating models are most aligned to what customers now expect: simplicity by design, experience-led thinking, automation built into the core of how they operate.”

Dave said the sector had an opportunity and responsibility to evolve again.

“We’ve done it before. We’ve transformed connectivity in this country and brought the world closer together. Now the next transformation for ISPs is about integrity, reliability, simplicity and trust,” he said.

“Broadband needs to become invisible.”

Dave also called for NBN Co to accelerate its fibre-to-the-premises rollout, which he described as the most important investment in closing the reliability gap.

“NBN’s capital is best invested in completing that job, accelerating FTTP enablement, upgrading HFC performance within the existing footprint or even replacing it with FTTP, and closing the experience gap that continues to drive complaints and churn, because you can’t build trust on a foundation that is variable and therefore unreliable,” he told the conference.

Samira Sarraf

Agentic AI helping deliver autonomous networks

TPG Telecom is working with Amazon Web Services on autonomous broadband orchestration, employing agentic AI to help identify fault demarcation.

AWS Australia head of telco Nathan Hill told attendees at the CommsDay Summit that the work could help the telco understand whether an issue originated on its own network, within NBN Co’s network or in the customer’s in-home Wi-Fi.

Agentic AI was making it possible to deliver on the potential of autonomous networks, Hill said.

The initial promise of autonomous networking failed due to factors including ex-

ploding integration costs, vendor lock-in and the inability of rules to scale, Hill said. But he said there had since been a fundamental shift, with telcos taking ownership and building a digital twin of their entire network environments.

“On autonomous networks, the operators moving first are building structural advantages,” he said. “Start with one use case, root cause analysis, alarm, correlation, capacity, forecasting. Own the data layer, own the automation. Don’t outsource your intelligence... The autonomous network use cases, they’re in production at operators. You know the gap isn’t technology anymore, it’s action. Eight weeks from concept to production.”

Hill also used his address to detail a four-layer framework that could support data sovereignty requirements while allowing telcos to adopt AI more aggressively.

He noted that McKinsey estimated AI would unlock \$60bn to \$100bn in annual value for the telecom industry. Meanwhile, Altman Solon estimated that operators already leading in AI were achieving a 7% EBITDA uplift, compared to about 2% for the rest of the industry.

“That’s not incremental. That’s transformative,” Hill said.

Hill said AI sovereignty could be broken into four layers.

“Think of it like a network stack — you need all of them, not just the one that’s easiest to draw on a whiteboard,” he said.

The first layer was where an organisation’s personally identifiable information actually resided, Hill said. This involved awareness of not only where an organisation’s data resided, but also where the platforms managing the data were operated.

Hill said it was important to classify AI workloads by data sensitivity, then enforce region pinning architecturally.

“Classification without enforcement is a policy document. Enforcement without classification is a firewall with zero rules,” he said.

The second layer involved operational sovereignty, meaning determining who in an ecosystem had access to AI systems and under what conditions.

“We recommend naming one executive accountable for AI sovereignty. One person. Documented escalation paths. Put identity controls around everything, time-bounded, geo-restricted, with full audit trails. This can take months to build. Start now,” Hill said.

The third layer involved model sovereignty, which meant having full control over the deployment of AI models so an organisation was not caught out by changes such as model deprecation or pricing changes, Hill said.

The final layer involved infrastructure sovereignty. But this did not mean buying



Nathan Hill

and owning GPUs or racks, because a GPU bought today was largely obsolete within three years, Hill said.

“So what does it mean? You need to build a credible exit. Your governance layer, including access rules, guardrails and audit configurations, should live in formats you own and can extract.”

Dylan Bushell-Embling

BAI urges greater focus on in-building connectivity

BAI Communications has called for connectivity to be addressed in the first stages of infrastructure planning, with chief commercial officer Elyssa Rollinson backing an approach that addresses public cellular, operational systems and public safety systems in a unified way.

Around 80% of mobile traffic originates indoors, Rollinson told the CommsDay Summit.

“We have built one of the world’s most impressive outdoor networks and we have as an industry and government underestimated and underinvested in the environments where Australians actually live, work and move through their days,” she said.

Australia was in the middle of an infrastructure boom and the current approach would lead to patchy outcomes across different communications requirements, including public safety, Rollinson said.

Rollinson noted that mobile network operators had increasingly concluded that passive infrastructure such as towers did not need to be owned by them.

“It follows then that the in-building and underground network infrastructure is also not strategic for them to own; that creates a gap,” she said. “Network infrastructure needs someone to own it, invest in it and take a long term view of its performance.”

The answer was what BAI called the independent operator model, she said.

“One infrastructure owner, one implementation, one organisation accountable for the management and performance of the entire communications layer across all users for the life of the network,” she said.

“Costs are lower, outcomes are better because the decisions are made once by the people who will still be operating the network long after the ribbon on the infrastructure build is cut... When you know you will be running a network in 2036, you make different choices in 2026. You design for performance and scalability from the start.”

Rohan Pearce

Indara calls for new era of partnership on mobile deployments

Indara Digital Infrastructure CEO Emilio Romeo has called for a new era of partnership between mobile network infrastructure providers, mobile network operators, industry, regulators and governments to help Australia regain its 5G leadership.

At the CommsDay Summit, Romeo said Australia was leading the world with 5G deployment in 2019 but seven years later still did not have 5G Standalone available nationally.

Romeo said mobile network infrastructure providers such as Indara had a critical role to play in the deployment of 5G and other mobile networks. But despite carriers asking for faster deployments and governments wanting more resilient networks and efficient rollouts, Indara's efforts were often frustrated by factors including the slow pace of the development approvals process.

Romeo said Indara's data from 2026 showed it was taking the company an average of 511 days to receive development approval for a site.

"That's 17 months, and that's an average, which means some sites take two or three years. The state-funded black spot program can take three to five years," he said. "The irony of it all is we have a 98% success rate. That means 98% of our sites get approved. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could do it 500 days earlier?"

Romeo said Indara was calling for nationally consistent, streamlined access guidelines and rules for councils to follow.

The regulatory framework for mobile infrastructure deployment urgently needed updating because it was developed for an era when carriers owned all of the infrastructure, Romeo said.

"We want a framework that positively supports MNIPs for these jobs. We want to streamline the resolution of issues and the process that guides us. When there are disputes between communities, MNIPs, the carriers, the government, we need a process that helps us get there quicker and streamlines the resolution of these issues, and we need to set clear, enforceable time frames and processes that the councils can follow," he said.

Mobile network infrastructure providers and other industry stakeholders could assist by working more closely with councils while they were making decisions about wireless infrastructure deployments, Romeo said. Councils should be encouraged to adopt a model that treated mobile sites as state significant infrastructure, he said.

"We need to help them understand the benefits of this fast evolving technology. We need to ensure that they have access to clear, consistent guidelines, we need to ensure that we help them reduce administrative burden on them. We also need to help them prioritise those sites that are mission critical for emergency services," he said.

"We just need to move with a sense of urgency to avoid the risk of falling behind other nations that do treat telecommunications as critical infrastructure. Let's claim back our lead."

Dylan Bushell-Embling

AI-ready networks must emphasise upload speeds: Ericsson

Rapid developments in AI will require telcos to re-engineer their mobile networks to emphasise upload speeds and advanced capabilities, according to Ericsson ANZ managing director Ludvig Landgren.

Speaking at the CommsDay Summit, Landgren said 40% of today's 5G networks did not meet minimum upload speed requirements and 80% of networks were not able to provide the latency needed for advanced 5G applications.

Landgren said AI capabilities were doubling every four to seven months. In Austral-

ia, multimodal AI usage was forecast to double by 2030 and 45% of traffic was expected to originate from outside the home by that time.

While mobile networks today had been designed to perform at a ratio of 10 download units to one upload unit, technologies such as AI-enabled glasses required an 8:1 uplink-to-downlink ratio, Landgren said.

“So networks are fundamentally changing, not only through AI agents, but also through how [the] network is used by you and me,” he said.

Networks had been built for strong downlink performance, but telcos needed to address the fundamental change in uplink demand driven by devices such as AI-enabled glasses and agent-to-agent communication, he said.

To accommodate demand, AI-ready mobile networks would need to be uplink-first, use 5G standalone technology and take advantage of features such as massive MIMO and dynamic network slicing, Landgren said. Networks were evolving to use what Ericsson called an intelligent fabric, whereby AI, cloud and mobile applications operated as a unified platform, he said.

Landgren described a proof-of-concept project with Optus involving the use of smart glasses streaming in real time. Through effective management of the network, the companies were able to double uplink capacity at Vivid Sydney this year compared with 2025.

He also noted that Ericsson was working with Telstra on world-first 6G testing in a lab environment. The characteristics of 6G best suited to AI would include greater autonomy, scalable RANs and integrated sensing, Landgren said.

Telstra was also leading the world with dynamic 5G using managed service level agreements, meaning customers only paid if they received the performance covered by the agreements, he added.

AUSTRALIA MUST ACT FAST: But to capture the opportunities promised by AI, Australia would need to move faster with the adoption of 5G standalone technology, Landgren said. Today adoption stood at only around 30%, compared with 100% in Singapore and 70% in the US.

“Australia needs to go from an AI buyer to an AI builder. The ecosystem must act, align, and scale; so that’s ecosystem is beyond networks. Regulators need to think about 6G spectrum, ensuring that there’s 200MHz of contiguous spectrum for each operator of 6G in Australia, and uplink needs to evolve,” he said.

“Australia has the right assets, Australia has strong operators, Australia has a government that’s paying attention, and there’s a window that’s open. We [in the industry] need to lead the shift.”

Dylan Bushell-Embling

Opticomm plots path to 10G

Uniti Group’s fibre wholesale arm Opticomm is planning to ensure greenfields residential developments commencing from 2027 onwards are capable of 10Gbps wholesale speeds, its chief executive has revealed.

Addressing the CommsDay Summit, Uniti Group chief executive Kevin Teoh welcomed NBN Co’s Accelerate Great speed uplift as well as its commitment to allowing

94% of premises on its network to order 1Gbps-plus wholesale speeds by 2030.

“At Opticomm we are going a step further by targeting 100% of our network being 1Gbps or above enabled in the same timeframe,” Teoh said.

He also revealed that Opticomm was working with partners to potentially launch 25Gbps and 50Gbps pilot sites in the next 12 months.

Teoh, who was appointed chief executive in late 2025, said Opticomm had close to 1 million connected or contracted household premises in its footprint, with more than 22,000km of fibre connecting homes.

“It is a privilege that we do not take lightly,” he said.

Teoh said expanding multi-device ecosystems in Australian households were driving demand for faster speeds, with data consumption growing at 20-25% per year.

“Our expectations of quality, quantity, reliability, and especially speed, are higher than ever before in an environment where on-demand is now just how things are done rather than something reserved for the privileged few,” he said.

The chief executive said more than 50% of Opticomm customers were now choosing 500Mbps-plus plans when they activated a service on the network, including people moving into a newly built home or an established home. In April, 59% of activations were for 500Mbps, compared with less than 26% a year earlier, he said.

“Similarly, when customers are moving from one RSP to another, we see about 50% of them upgrading their speed, with another 30% staying on the same plan,” Teoh said.

He said that along with end users, the company’s ecosystem of 76 RSPs was benefiting.

Keeping up with growing demand required efforts from retailers, backhaul providers, network equipment manufacturers, government and regulators, Teoh said.

Teoh called for the government to stop cross-subsidies and funding investment in infrastructure in areas where there was no market failure.

“Redirect that investment to funding the cross subsidies that the corporate sector is currently paying, to free up the corporate sector to reinvest those funds into innovation and growth,” he said.

Rohan Pearce

ACCENTURE WARNS ON AI

Accenture ANZ communications and media industry lead Gohulan Sivathan has warned telcos against using AI to optimise individual channels while leaving the underlying customer experience unchanged. Sivathan told the CommsDay Summit that the sector was too often focused on computational power and security rather than “asking the right questions.” He said Accenture research with Australian mid-market and small business customers showed the human component remained non-negotiable, that customers viewed many digital channels as shifting work from the telco to the customer and that many believed AI would be deployed to help providers rather than users. He said 95% of customers surveyed expected to use an AI agent in their buying journey, meaning telcos needed to design sales information for machines as well as humans. Sivathan said telcos should decide what to expose to machines,

what work to eliminate, what should remain human and how to orchestrate the experience.

KEARNEY WARNS ON NEXT DECADE

Kearney partner Zorawar Singh and global lead for communications, media and technology Owen Tracey have warned that the next decade for telcos will be defined by whether the industry can convert network capability into assured customer outcomes and sustainable returns. Singh told the CommsDay Summit that Australia had done a strong job over the past decade expanding coverage, capacity and capability, including mobile coverage, the NBN rollout and fibre investment, but the next phase would centre on investment sustainability, AI-scale infrastructure, resilience and sovereign capability. Tracey said the industry did not need another message about moving “beyond connectivity,” but a conversion model for turning network capability into dependable outcomes. He outlined scenarios including a “utility squeeze”, consolidated scale and assured capability, warning that telcos risked carrying the obligations of critical infrastructure while receiving the commercial returns of a utility unless regulatory and business models better supported investment.

D2C USERS TO REACH 133M BY 2031: JUNIPER RESEARCH

Monthly active direct-to-cell users are expected to reach 133 million by 2031, up from a nascent 17.4 million in 2026, according to a new forecast from Juniper Research. Growth will be driven by mobile network operators launching new D2C services and the entry of new satellite operators such as AST SpaceMobile and others. Despite the projections on user numbers, Juniper said actual usage would likely fall below initial market expectations, citing coverage challenges in urban environments and primarily localised demand in remote regions. The researchers recommended that MNOs adopt flexible and temporary plans to address user requirements.

ANTHROPIC FILES DRAFT PAPER FOR IPO

Anthropic has filed a draft registration statement for a proposed initial public offering of its common stock with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. The firm said it had yet to set the number of shares to be offered or the price. Anthropic’s announcement followed days after it launched a US\$65b fundraising effort and the recent signing of a US\$1.25b per month deal to acquire compute capacity from SpaceX’s Colossus 1 data centre campus in Memphis, Tennessee.

NVIDIA LAUNCHES AIPC CHIP

Nvidia has launched the RTX Spark chip to power artificial intelligence-enabled Windows-based personal computers, targeting enhanced support for personal on-device agents. The RTX Spark chip platform combines an Nvidia Blackwell RTX GPU via the Nvidia NVLink-to-C2C chip-to-chip interconnect with a 20-core Nvidia Grace CPU and features up to 1 petaflop of AI compute and 128GB of unified memory to run on-device agents, Nvidia said.

10 YEARS AGO IN COMMSDAY

Optus has revealed a new commercial software-defined networking service: a product dubbed Optus Cloud-N, specifically built as a wholesale white label offering. It's the latest indication that SDN has moved beyond the hype cycle and is shaping up as part of the competitive telco landscape in Australia.

Telstra Global says that enterprise customer use of software defined networking in the WAN is now becoming a genuine phenomenon.

Huawei Australia cyber security officer and former CTO Peter Rossi, a highly regarded veteran of more than 30 years experience in the Australian telecommunications industry, passed away early on Monday morning. He was 52 years old.

Telstra has expanded its financial trading network across key Asian markets, announcing a trio of new point-to-point routes linking the stock exchanges of Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo as part of its Ethernet Private Line Express service.

LATEST SHARE PRICES

	Company name	Change (%)	Last price	Change	Volume	Market cap
	5G Networks Limited	+6.90%	0.0930	+0.0060	1.02M	25.12M
	Pentanet Limited	0.00%	0.0180	0.0000	6,380	7.797M
	Aussie Broadband Limited	-1.95%	5.53	-0.11	771,279	1.622B
	Comms Group Limited	+1.35%	0.0750	+0.0010	355,049	41.007M
	Chorus Limited	-0.63%	7.89	-0.05	1.49M	3.423B
	Macquarie Technology Group Limited	-0.30%	76.11	-0.23	50,112	1.962B
	Megaport Limited	0.00%	16.61	0.00	1.885M	3.054B
	NEXTDC Limited	+1.35%	15.73	+0.21	3.57M	11.367B
	Superloop Limited	+2.29%	3.5800	+0.0800	1.546M	1.843B
	Spark New Zealand Limited	-2.80%	1.5650	-0.0450	1.762M	2.958B
	Swoop Holdings Limited	0.00%	0.0930	0.0000	446,863	28.929M
	Telstra Group Limited	0.00%	5.16	0.00	30.458M	57.738B
	TPG Telecom Limited	-7.50%	3.7000	-0.3000	5.289M	7.263B

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