

“We believe the relay-based approach will be quicker and cheaper,” the department said in the briefing, arguing the alternative would involve greater cost and complexity because it would require integration with state and territory emergency call infrastructure.

The department said at the time the pilot was primarily aimed at people “living in, working in or travelling through areas without terrestrial mobile coverage.”

However, it acknowledged that restricting access geographically would be difficult and that the service could consequently also be used by vulnerable people in areas with mobile coverage, including those experiencing domestic, family or other forms of violence.

“Attempting to limit the service exclusively to areas without terrestrial mobile coverage would be highly technically challenging—and for those living on the edge of coverage who may find themselves falling in and out of access to the text relay service, confusing or even life-threatening,” the briefing said.

Rohan Pearce

OneWiFi rejects roaming in favour of mandatory network sharing

OneWiFi & Infrastructure has urged policymakers to favour mandatory active network sharing over regulated domestic roaming, arguing roaming risks entrenching regional under-investment rather than fixing it.

The company told the parliamentary inquiry into Triple Zero that while roaming could give customers in single-operator areas access to another network, it questioned whether the policy would improve services overall.

OneWiFi director of policy and regulatory engagement Peter Hitchiner said active sharing would instead spread deployment costs across multiple operators and give each a direct presence in regional markets.



Peter Hitchiner

“It’s largely financial because you share a lot of the capital costs and the operating costs are actually shared amongst three,” he told CommsDay. “So it makes it a viable proposition for everybody to at least get a presence in all markets.”

Hitchiner said the weakness of roaming was that it could allow operators to gain regional coverage without committing capital to infrastructure.

“Mandated roaming takes the pressure off the networks that don’t have the infrastructure to invest in new infrastructure,” he said. “If you can get service without investing in network infrastructure, it’s money for jam.”

He said sharing could also bring more spectrum into use in areas where operators hold frequencies but lack infrastructure.

“They’ve got all this spectrum there that’s not being used,” he said. “By releasing that asset, you provide more capacity for the community as well.”

OneWiFi said RAN sharing was “well suited to remote and indigenous communities where the costs of deployment for a single operator are prohibitive.”

“Whilst the concept of infrastructure sharing is publicly embraced by the MNOs,

the reality is that most sharing occurs in the urban areas of our major cities and suburbs,” it said.

“It drops dramatically outside the populated urban centres, with only 38 per cent of sites shared in outer regional and remote areas and less than a quarter in remote areas.”

The company argued that competitive dynamics had prevented sharing from taking hold where it was most needed and said policy should instead drive “more terrestrial mobile infrastructure and mandating active sharing of infrastructure on a neutral host basis.”

RESILIENCE: Hitchiner also addressed the argument that putting several operators on shared infrastructure could create a common point of failure.

He said lower deployment costs could allow more sites to be built with overlapping coverage, while backhaul could also be duplicated.

“If you reduce the cost of an installation, you can afford to densify the network and provide overlapping coverage from adjacent sites,” he said.

OneWiFi has also demonstrated LEO satellite connectivity for 5G backhaul in remote locations.

“We’ve shown that it can be done now with LEO,” Hitchiner said.

The company said active sharing could give communities access to multiple mobile core networks, improve Triple Zero resilience and make duplicated backhaul more affordable.

OneWiFi pointed to New Zealand’s Rural Connectivity Group, involving all three MNOs, as evidence that shared infrastructure could work at scale. Hitchiner said government funding had been important in establishing that model.

“One would hope that the government would take a leadership role in that,” he said. “I think that’s really what happened in New Zealand because it was the funding that allowed it to happen.”

He said Australia’s regional connectivity and mobile black spot programs could similarly make public funding conditional on shared infrastructure.

“The incumbent operators are very reluctant to share,” Hitchiner said.

“It’s probably, from a mobile network operator’s point of view, an inconvenient truth that infrastructure sharing is something which can be applied to everyone’s advantage, not only the operators, but also the community.”

TRIPLE ZERO: OneWiFi also proposed wider use of automated service assurance to test emergency calling at remote sites.

Its Autonomous Emergency Call Verification Agent can remotely verify Triple Zero access without requiring technicians to travel to each location. The tool is already being used at OneWiFi active-sharing sites in regional NSW.

“Every time you make a change in a network, you can check it just to make sure it’s still working,” Hitchiner said.

“The problem with these networks is they’re so remote. Testing them every time a change is made is expensive unless you can do it remotely, autonomously.”

Rohan Pearce and Grahame Lynch