



Police Federation
of Australia
The National Voice of Policing

MEDIA RELEASE

DARK AGE OR DIGITAL AGE?

THE FUTURE OF FRONT-LINE POLICING DURING DISASTERS

Australian lives will be at risk during national disasters unless our police and emergency services can secure mobile broadband communications to support their hazardous front-line work, according to Police Federation spokesman, Mark Burgess.

The PFA Chief Executive told a Senate Committee today that unless public safety agencies in each State and Territory, and every region around the country, have access to the 700 MHz digital dividend for mobile communications, they will not be in good shape to protect life and property when natural disasters hit.

“We can not lose this once in a lifetime chance to bring emergency communications into the 21st century, and end up stuck in a communications dark age,” Mr Burgess said.

“We have seen from the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry Interim Report, and the many natural disasters of recent years, how critical good, modern communications are when floods, bushfires and cyclones strike.

“For police and fire and rescue services, they are ‘mission critical’ and determine whether these first responders can do their urgent work effectively. They could be the difference between saving lives and losing them.”

‘The Gillard Government has so far avoided setting aside the small slice of the 700 MHz band that police and emergency services need, but we have compelling evidence that there is no viable alternative,’ Mark Burgess said.

The 700 MHz band has become available due to the shift to digital television, and we have the chance to use this resource to benefit the entire community for years to come.”

“Imagine a fire fighter arriving at a burning building and being able to download a floorplan of that building onto a mobile device, or Our evidence is supported by a range of communications experts, he said.

'The alternative radio spectrum that the Gillard Government is examining for public safety agencies is not a viable solution, something that we demonstrated to the Senate Committee today,' Mr Burgess said.

'The clock is ticking for Parliament and the Government to get behind the needs of front-line police because the Australian Communications and Media Authority is planning to auction off all the 700 MHz band digital dividend to commercial carriers like Telstra and Optus in the second half of 2012 unless the Government reserves 20 MHz for public safety now,' Mr. Burgess said.

"It is inconceivable that the Australian Parliament and the Australian Government would not put the national interest and the public interest before the wishes of individual commercial operators and Australia's 55,000 police officers are keenly aware of what is in the public interest as far as their communications are concerned."

'We don't need any more natural disasters to prove that police and emergency services need mobile broadband communications, just as the general public need speedy broadband services in this digital age,' Mark Burgess said.

'Australian public safety agencies like our police services will soon be behind the rest of the developed world unless we move to mobile broadband communications as the USA and Canada are doing with the support of their governments.'

Governments around the country also need to vastly improve:

- their 000 phone service to ensure a more reliable responses to public calls for help; and
- the national Emergency Alert System of SMS messages to the public.

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Attachment:

Summary of 800 MHz spectrum compared with 700 MHz