



Response to the draft Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Amendment Determination 2009

Submission by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
to the Australian Communications and Media Authority



November 2010



The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is the peak body that represents all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. ACCAN provides a strong unified voice to industry and government as consumers work towards availability, accessibility and affordability of communications services for all Australians.

Consumers need ACCAN to promote better consumer protection outcomes ensuring speedy responses to complaints and issues. ACCAN aims to empower consumers so that they are well informed and can make good choices about products and services. As a peak body, ACCAN will activate its broad and diverse membership base to campaign to get a better deal for all communications consumers.

Contact:

Danielle Fried, Disability Policy Adviser

Suite 402, Level 4
55 Mountain Street
Ultimo NSW, 2007
Email: dani.fried@accan.org.au
Phone: (02) 9288 4000
Fax: (02) 9288 4019
TTY: (02) 9281 5322



Introduction

ACCAN is pleased to comment on the draft Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Amendment 2010 (the Amendment). ACCAN believes that, by mandating the provision of location information for emergency calls from mobile phones, the Amendment is likely to result in better outcomes for the many people in Australia who use a mobile phone to make emergency calls.

However, we note that the Amendment fails to address a number of key changes which are also necessary to protect emergency callers. In line with our Supplementary Submission to Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Determination 2009¹ ACCAN urges the ACMA to mandate the provision of similar location information for emergency calls from users of:

- VOIP services
- The proposed SMS emergency service
- The National Relay Service's internet relay service
- The National Relay Service's Speak and Listen service (whether via mobile or landline)
- The Australian Communication Exchange's video relay service
- The Australian Communication Exchange's web-based captioned telephony service.

ACCAN also urges ACMA to mandate the provision of location information for emergency calls from users of satellite services.

ACMA should also strongly consider mandating a call-back capacity for all of these users, as well as for users of mobile phones.

Overall, as always, ACCAN encourages the ACMA to take into account ACCAN's principle of available, accessible and affordable communications for Australians.

1

<http://www.accan.org.au/uploads/supplementary%20submission%20re%20emergency%20call%20services%20determination.pdf>



Response to draft Telecommunications (Emergency Call Service) Amendment Determination 2010

Which model?

ACCAN supports the 'push' model, to ensure that mobile location information is automatically provided for all emergency calls from mobile phones.

This model has the advantage of not only conforming to community expectations² - it is also the stated preference of emergency services, as it would provide a faster response time to emergency callers.

The NSW Police, for example, in its submission to the Proposal to Enhance the Mobile Location Information Available to the Emergency Call Service, contends that the 'push' model would both speed up response times and streamline the call verification process.³

The National Emergency Communications Working Group, in its submission supporting the 'push' model, states that delays caused by uncertain location information have added to trauma, injury and damage.⁴

The South Australian Police submission notes that the current situation has resulted in "rare (but unfortunately regular" instances of life-threatening situations in which ESOs have been unable to respond due to a lack of location information, and, further, that an increasing number of emergency calls are being made by people with mental illness, at risk of self-harm and refusing to provide location information, and that the 'push' model would "reduce poor ESO response and decision-making" in these and other instances.⁵

ACCAN understands that industry may be concerned at their readiness to successfully implement a push model in the near future; therefore, we recommend a transition period which could be divided up as follows:

- Phase 1: Carriers to provide enhanced mobile location information to emergency service organisations (ESOs) upon request by an ESO for any given call to Triple Zero (or 112), in line with the 'pull' model. The information must be provided within a reasonable timeframe, to be specified in the Determination.
- Phase 2: Carriers to provide enhanced mobile location information to an ESO with every Triple Zero or 112 call (the 'push' model). This information would include the location of the cell site or base station transmitting the call.

²

http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib311840/enhanced_mobile_location_information_for_the_emergency_call_service.pdf

³ http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib311840/nsw_police_ifc12-2010.pdf

⁴ http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib311840/necwg_ifc12-2010.pdf

⁵ http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/assets/main/lib311840/sa_police_ifc12-2010.pdf



- Phase 3: Carriers to provide enhanced mobile location information to an ESO with every Triple Zero or 112 call (the 'push' model). This information would include more precise location information - specifically, the latitude and longitude of the caller. This information must meet accuracy standards, generally to within 50 to 300 meters, depending on the type of technology used.⁶

This is similar to the process advocated by St John Ambulance WA⁷, and by the National Emergency Communications Working Group⁸, both of which see the 'pull' model as an interim solution, with the 'push' model being the preferred final outcome.

ACCAN notes that this proposed transition period towards very accurate location information would require a number of changes to the draft Amendment.

Exemptions and preparations

Realistically, time will be needed for carriers who do not currently have commercial location-based services deployed or are not technologically ready to provide mobile location information, to make appropriate upgrades that will allow for the availability of accurate location information. To this end, ACCAN supports the provision for those carriers to request that the ACMA provides a temporary exemption from providing location information.

The ACMA should require and enforce clear milestones for any carrier which has been given an exemption, to ensure that carriers undertake appropriate measures towards providing accurate location information to emergency services during this exemption period. A key responsibility of carriers should be to submit transition plans to the ACMA.

The ACMA also needs to use its regulatory authority to put provisions in place that discourage carriers from developing or using technology or systems that do not incorporate measures to allow carriers to adhere to the phase-based transition model.

Communications with consumers

The ACMA will no doubt – and quite rightly - take some responsibility for educating the public about any changes to how emergency calls are handled in relation to mobile location information.

Carriers should also be required to provide their customers with the following information, in plain English, and also, preferably, in the most common community languages:

- If the carrier has received an exemption from the ACMA, that mobile location information is not currently provided. (This should be noted to potential customers before any contract is signed.)
- If the carrier has received an exemption from the ACMA, the date when the carrier will commence providing mobile location information

⁶ See <http://www.fcc.gov/pshs/services/911-services/enhanced911/Welcome.html>

⁷ http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib311840/st_john_ambulance_ifc12-2010.pdf

⁸ http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib311840/necwg_ifc12-2010.pdf



- That, unlike with non-emergency calls, both telephone number identification and location information are provided to the call recipient (that is, ultimately, the emergency service organisation).

This information should be made available to individual customers (for example, in contracts, bills and if necessary in specific letters) and also on the carrier's website.

Publishers of hard-copy and online phone directories should also be required to provide their customers with the following information, in plain English, and also, preferably, in the most common community languages:

- That, unlike with non-emergency calls, both telephone number identification and location information are provided to the call recipient (that is, ultimately, the emergency service organisation).

Costs

ACCAN believes that industry is best placed to comment on expected costs arising from the proposed Amendment.

Conclusion

Amending the Determination to require carriers provide location information for users of mobile phones in emergency situations is an excellent step towards meeting community expectations.

ACCAN will continue to encourage ACMA to broaden these requirements so that all emergency callers – whether users of landline, mobile, SMS, VOIP, satellite, Speak and Listen, internet relay, video relay or captioned telephony services – can assume equally robust and accurate provision of location information.