

*From the Office of the Chairperson*

6 November 2025

The Honourable Paul Goldsmith  
Minister for Media and Communications  
Email: P.Goldsmith@ministers.govt.nz

Cc: The Honourable Mark Mitchell  
Minister for Emergency Management  
Email: M.Mitchell@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Goldsmith

**Re: Strengthening Resilience of Mobile Communication Infrastructure in the South**

The Otago Regional Council wishes to raise an urgent matter regarding the resilience of mobile communications infrastructure across Otago and Southland, following the recent severe weather events that caused widespread and prolonged disruption to power and telecommunications.

The October storm left many communities in the lower South Island without power and mobile coverage for extended periods after cell towers lost power within hours of the outages.

We understand that telecommunications providers have made progress on improving network redundancy, but recent events show that current backup standards remain insufficient, particularly in rural and remote areas. Most cell towers rely on battery power for only a few hours, and generator deployment is logistically difficult when road access is limited.

We therefore urge the Government to consider:

- Introducing a regulatory minimum standard for cell tower power backup systems to ensure that networks remain operational for an extended period during emergencies.
- Supporting a transition plan, backed by central government funding or incentives, to upgrade existing infrastructure across rural regions.
- Exploring interoperability and switching options between networks when one provider's coverage fails, particularly for emergency calls.
- Recognising mobile communications infrastructure as a critical lifeline service within the Civil Defence Emergency Management framework.
- Working collaboratively with regional and district councils, and emergency management groups, to identify high-risk areas and prioritise investment.

Our suggested actions strongly align with the recommendations contained in the *Telecommunications Resilience in Hawke's Bay* report (July 2024), commissioned following multiple communications failures during Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023.

We also note the importance of local radio broadcasting during such events. Many rural areas rely on community radio for updates when digital and mobile systems fail. We ask that the Government consider ways to support the viability of local radio stations, recognising their essential role in public safety and communication during emergencies.

Councillors from across Otago support this call and believe that improving telecommunications resilience is an essential part of building climate and disaster readiness in our regions. We are aware that some of the issues raised in this letter will be addressed through the proposed Emergency Management Bill (2025) and we intend on signalling our strong support for a much greater focus on critical infrastructure resilience through formal submission processes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials to discuss practical next steps and how local government can assist in strengthening network resilience.

Regards,

**Hilary Calvert**  
**Chair, Otago Regional Council**