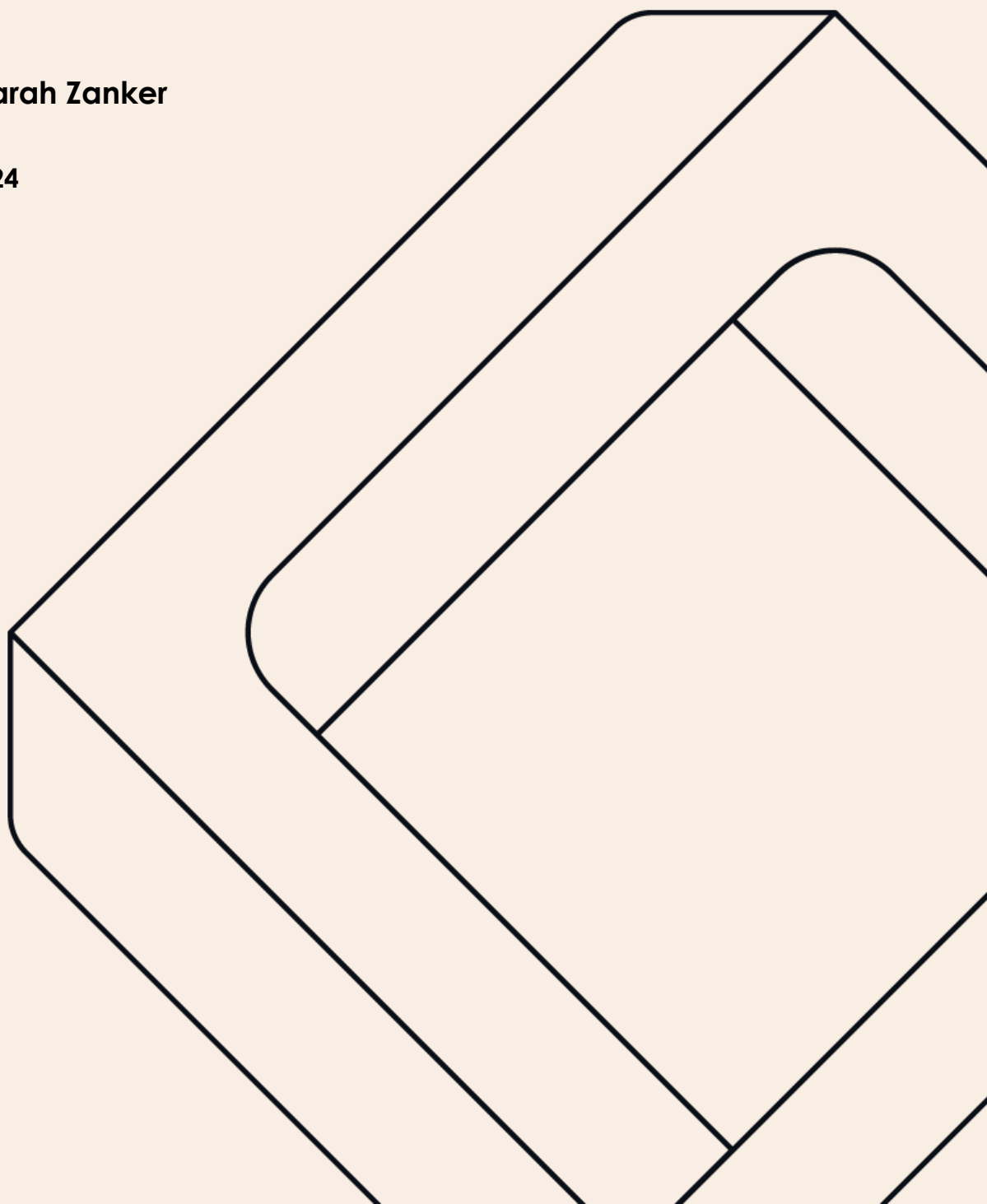# Post incident customer experience review following the recent storm and outage event in Tasmania.

Final Report

Prepared by Sarah Zanker

12 November 2024

Acknowledgement of country

Verian respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and operate, and pay our respects to all Elders, past and present.

We recognise their strengths and enduring connection to lands, waters and skies as the Custodians of the oldest continuing cultures on the planet. We remain committed to actively contributing to Australia's reconciliation journey through listening and learning, sharing diverse voices with our clients and working together for a better tomorrow.

Foreword

It has been a privilege engaging with Tasmanians for this review. Tasmanians are highly resilient and were always, open, honest and constructive in our conversations.

What became clear throughout the course of the consultation was that while TasNetworks has access to the right channels for keeping customers up to date, a lack of timely updates impacted their effectiveness in keeping customers informed.

Overwhelmingly, the most pertinent information is the estimated restoration time. Customers don't expect TasNetworks to have all the relevant information available the moment an outage is experienced, however they do expect TasNetworks to have an up-to-date website during outage events, and to communicate proactively (via SMS) when new information (restoration times) becomes available.

In a major storm event such as this, Tasmanians understand that it takes time to assess the extent of the damage, triage outages and prioritise restoration of power to critical services and vulnerable customers.

Customers expressed a deep appreciation for the field crews who worked to restore power throughout and following the storm, and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to help TasNetworks reflect on what worked well in its communications throughout the recent storm event, and what can be learned from the experience.

This document presents an independent summary of the conversations held with Tasmanian communities, businesses and stakeholders, about TasNetworks communications throughout the recent storm event.

During the consultation sessions, some communities raised pertinent issues for TasNetworks consideration that span beyond the scope of this review. These have been included in the report, as promised to customers as part of the consultation process.

It is important to also note the industrial action at play prior to the storm event. While every effort was made to focus on the storm specific communications considerations, it is likely that perceptions for some, may have been impacted by the industrial action covered in the media prior to the storm event. As much as possible, these have been separated from the findings presented in this report, however for major businesses, they are tightly intertwined.

Expressed in every session was customers' deep appreciation for TasNetworks field crews, and their readiness to restore power, under very extreme and challenging circumstances. This gratitude should be conveyed to these teams as part of the review process.

I trust this report provides a platform for learning and further planning for TasNetworks, to enable improvements in communications with Tasmanian communities in future major outage events.

I am delighted to present the experiences and views of customers and stakeholders as part of this review process.

Sarah Zanker
National Director
Verian Group

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Executive Summary

Background

In late August 2024, a severe weather front (later declared a natural disaster by the Tasmanian and Australian Government) impacted the entire State of Tasmania for an unprecedented period of five consecutive days. During the storm, a record number of customers were without power, and some were also without access to telecommunications services. Due to the severity of the storms and the safety hazards it created, some remote communities experienced outages of up to 20 days before restoration could safely occur.

TasNetworks engaged Verian to undertake a Post Incident Customer Experience (CX) Review aimed to understand customer and stakeholder experiences, and their perceptions of TasNetworks' communications performance during the storm event and throughout the recovery process.

Qualitative research was used for this Review, including small group discussions with customers and SME's and one-on-one interviews with vulnerable customers, stakeholders and large businesses. This approach enabled open sharing of experiences and a constructive forum for reflecting on what worked well in terms of TasNetworks communication throughout the outage, and what can be learnt for future events. In total, 86 customers, 9 major businesses and 12 stakeholders provided feedback to inform this Review.

Expectations of TasNetworks throughout major outage events

It was widely agreed that this storm event was the worst in Tasmania in living memory. Customers and stakeholders were grateful to crews who restored power quickly under extremely challenging circumstances.

Given the severity of the storm and the destruction it caused, customers were not surprised to be impacted by outages to power and other services. They were also understanding of the task ahead of TasNetworks, acknowledging the risks to field crews and their ability to respond to outages safely, and in a timely manner. Customers and stakeholders repeatedly expressed their gratitude to TasNetworks field crews for their hard work in restoring power in a timely manner.

Customers and stakeholders agreed that in major outage events, TasNetworks should be prioritising safe and timely restoration of power, and communications that keep Tasmanians up to date on estimated restoration times. The exception to this is any support services provided in the way of backup power supply to vulnerable or critical customers.

Customers and stakeholders agreed that additional supports (such as recovery centres) are best coordinated by local governments, and that the media should be led by an Emergency Coordinator (such as the Premier, SES or Tasmania Police), with TasNetworks (and other parties) senior leadership providing a support role within the media.

Unless a power-only incident (such as a cyber attack), there was no expectation for TasNetworks to lead the coordination of media or additional support services, though could provide general information/communications about these services to customers.

Communications performance (distribution customer channels)

During a major outage event, the information needs for customers are extremely clear. **They need to know that TasNetworks is aware of the outage, and when power is expected to be restored.**

While TasNetworks has access to the right channels for keeping customers up to date, a lack of timely and consistent updates provided throughout the outage and recovery impacted their effectiveness in keeping customers informed.

The lack of information was the most significant pain point for customers throughout the outage event. Customers don't expect TasNetworks to have all the relevant information available the moment an outage is experienced, however they do expect TasNetworks to have an up-to-date website during outage events, and to communicate proactively (via SMS) when new information (restoration times) becomes available.

Website

- TasNetworks' website is expected to be the single source of truth; however a lack of updates meant it underperformed throughout the outage event.

- The website is user-friendly, and the outage map well liked and used to understand which areas are impacted, and allows people to check on their neighbours, friends and family members and organise support where needed.

- Reporting is straightforward and the 'register for updates' feature is positive (in lieu of automatic updates provided without having to register) however functionality was sub-optimal throughout the storm and outage event.

- The website was not kept up to date, and consistently failed to answer customers' most critical question – 'when will my power be restored?'. Customers desire even a broad estimate of restoration time, to manage their expectations and enable appropriate preparation for a potential extended outage.

- The website was often inaccurate, or slow to be updated as power was restored. There was a delay between a customer reporting an outage, and the outage appearing online, creating uncertainty, frustration and for some, cynicism.

SMS

- Some received SMS notification of TasNetworks awareness of the outage, and some received an SMS notification confirming power restoration. While not overly memorable and often extremely delayed, many customers received an SMS stating either that TasNetworks was aware of their outage and to check the website for updates, or that power had recently been restored at the customers' address. SMS updates however were not consistent nor timely.

- Many did not receive communications from TasNetworks via SMS during the outage or post-restoration, and believed SMS notifications and updates should be opt-out by default, particularly if linked to restoration time (either informing customers of an indicated, confirmed or changed restoration time). A lack of updates was less acceptable to customers, than multiple updates with adjustments to estimated restoration time. Most important was keeping customers up to date.

- In the event of very long outages (days), customers expect a frequency to updates, such as a commitment to a 6-hourly update so customers remain informed. Even if nothing has changed, it reassures customers that TasNetworks are acting.

- Community-centric content (e.g. 'check on your neighbours') was thoughtful and appreciated. Phrases such as 'there's an outage at your address' came across as somewhat patronising to some customers, with alternate language such as 'we're aware of the outage impacting your address and are working on it' suggested. SMS communications should also highlight when customers can expect the next update.

Call centre

- Many contacted the call centre to receive information they were unable to gain online or through another source. The experience suggests the call centre had no greater access to information than what was available on the website. This point was not highlighted to customers at any stage throughout the pre-recorded message.

- While the call centre team were largely friendly given the circumstances, customers experienced long wait times to receive information, including a frustrating wait through the pre-recorded message, only to be told that the restoration time is still to be confirmed.

- No escalation point was provided to customers in a more critical or urgent situation, nor where the need to raise a nuanced scenario was required (e.g. major business with no account manager, dairy farmer requiring power for milking).

Communications performance (major business and stakeholder channels)

Stakeholders and major businesses had a different communications relationship with TasNetworks throughout the outage and subsequent recovery and restoration process. Stakeholders typically had a liaison officer within TasNetworks, and major businesses were supported by an account manager.

Throughout the duration of the outage and recovery process, organisations with this access to TasNetworks could not speak more highly of the responsiveness, dedication and desire of these members of staff to answer their questions and look to facilitate good outcomes for businesses and the community.

A lack of visibility over restoration times (or estimated length of the outage) created ambiguity around how to plan to support their operations (major businesses) and communities (stakeholders). Without even an estimated or ballpark timeframe (e.g. 'it's likely to be a few days', or, 'we are looking like at least a week') they couldn't confidently enact business continuity plans (in the case of major businesses), or informed community support services (for stakeholders). Setting expectations as soon as possible is critical.

Opportunities to improve the experience included better communications around restoration times, works planning, collaboration and providing information in a way that facilitates the timely actions of stakeholder.

Major businesses

- Major businesses praised the responsiveness and dedication of their account manager within TasNetworks, and their solutions focus. The dedication of these team members was never questioned, and major businesses could not speak more highly of their responsiveness under considerable pressure and at almost all hours of the day and night. It was recognized widely that these team members worked tirelessly to keep stakeholders and customers as informed as possible, throughout the outage and recovery process.

- In storm related outages, TasNetworks typically responded quickly for major businesses, restoring power quickly and leaving customers satisfied with the experience. Some were able to cope with

the impacts of the outage, and those with an account manager commended TasNetworks for keeping them informed and restoring power as quickly as they could.

- Despite positive interactions with the account manager, a lack of information provided about the estimated length of the outage impacted businesses' ability to plan. Many had virtually no idea how long they would be without power, and this lack of even an estimated timeframe (e.g. 'it's likely to be a few days', or, 'we are looking like at least a week') meant they couldn't confidently enact contingency plans. Setting expectations as soon as possible is critical.

- Large, unmanaged businesses would have benefitted from an escalation point or dedicated contact beyond the residential communications channels. A lack of information around restoration time impacted their ability to plan in response to the outage. For these businesses, there was (or was perceived to be) no channel for escalating these more critical business issues and their questions around restoration time. A dedicated business phone number, or proactive contact from TasNetworks with a broad estimated restoration time would have enabled more confident decision making.

- Major businesses also accessed the TasNetworks website, experiencing the same frustrations as other customers, describing the same delays, inaccuracies and inconsistencies compared to the real experience, as residential and SME customers.

- It is important to highlight that several major businesses were impacted significantly by the ongoing industrial action, with tensions rising due to outages likely triggered by the storm event. While these organisations also experienced short, storm-related outages (due to lines down or vegetation), they were incredibly understanding of the situation, and had minimal concerns over how communications (via their account manager) were handled in these events. While the impacts of the industrial action were not in scope in this review, major businesses were deeply impacted, more so than they were because of the storm, and these findings have therefore been included.

- Supply chain considerations also impact major businesses. Many major businesses also rely on small or medium local businesses to support their operations. While major businesses may receive proactive and direct updates from their account manager, the remainder of the supply chain was relying on TasNetworks channels for information, including the website and call centre, which did not always provide answers to the critical questions.

Stakeholders

- TasNetworks engagement with established regional emergency management groups was effective and TasNetworks largely communicated well via these groups in providing information to critical stakeholders (SES, local government representatives and Police, Fire etc). Ensuring information flows through this group, rather than TasNetworks looking to create or establish another structure, is important for future major storm or outage events.

- A lack of visibility over restoration times created ambiguity around how to plan to support communities. Most had no idea how long their community would be without power, and without even an estimated timeframe (e.g. 'we are looking like at least a week'), it made the deployment of relief efforts much more challenging as there was a preference to direct additional support where the need would be greatest (where outages would last longest). Councils were provided with information on which suburbs have the highest number of outages, however had no visibility of which communities would experience the longest outages as this forward forecasting information was not available.

- More alignment was required in terms what TasNetworks was or wasn't doing regarding recovery centres. A lack of clarity around the expectation of councils led to much confusion. There are well defined emergency protocols that exist, however when TasNetworks publicly communicated about relief being available, this event hadn't yet been declared an event where such support would have been triggered. As a result, individual councils were required to make this decision on their own, and there was pressure to achieve some level of consistency with neighbouring councils. There is a need for a clearly defined trigger point for 'standing up' recovery centres in future storm events such as this, with expectations and responsibilities clear.

- Stakeholders appreciated the information received from TasNetworks, and suggested improvements to minimise the need for additional manipulation, making it more immediately actionable. For example, adding a municipality column on data provided to the SES emergency management group would have increased the speed at which key information could be shared with relevant councils. Similarly, a more streamlined way for community support organisations to efficiently check which clients were impacted would have expedited support for impacted clients (rather than having to search each address via the website). Importantly, these stakeholders were able to work within the information provided, however, there are system improvements that could be considered by TasNetworks.

- Stakeholders agreed there are benefits to agencies working collaboratively in times such as this. A lack of access to information about where works crews were made these efforts more difficult. Councils were open to more collaborative efforts, like this, to support TasNetworks expedite power restoration to communities. Considering whether more information can be shared with Councils that supports informed decision-making and collaborative efforts, could be explored.

While TasNetworks has access to the right channels for keeping customers up to date, a lack of timely updates impacted their effectiveness in keeping customers informed.

The most pertinent information is the estimated restoration time. Customers don't expect TasNetworks to have all the relevant information available the moment an outage is experienced, however they do expect TasNetworks to have an up-to-date website during outage events, and to communicate proactively (via SMS) when new information (restoration times) becomes available.

In a major storm event such as this, Tasmanians understanding that it takes time to assess the extent of the damage, triage outages and prioritise restoration of power to critical services and vulnerable customers. Customers expect TasNetworks to be focussed on their core business, that is, safely restoring power to customers, and keeping customers informed

Customers expressed a deep appreciation for the field crews who worked to restore power throughout and following the storm, and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to help TasNetworks reflect on what worked well in their communications throughout the recent storm event, and what can be learned from the experience.

Review recommendations

Distribution customer communications

- Improve the capacity of the website and speed of updates to minimise delays, improve accuracy, and keep customers informed
- Identify what drives the delay between a customer reporting an outage via the website, and the outage appearing online - consider a workaround for emergency events
- Review protocols or rules in place regarding estimated restoration time communications in natural disaster situations, ensuring there is some tolerance for ballpark timeframes to help set customer expectations
- Implement automatic SMS updates (opt-out by default) on TasNetworks' awareness of the outage, and when there is an initial estimated or updated restoration time
- Implement automated, opt-out by default, 6-hourly SMS updates in extended outages
- In the pre-recorded call centre recording instructions, highlight that the call centre has the same information as what is available on the website, and that the website is the most up to date source of information, to ensure the call centre is most available for those without internet access and those with low digital literacy
- Develop a plan and approach for offline (or alternate) communications where telecommunications are impacted. Satellite communications could be used to coordination public information sharing via in-region services (local government, emergency services etc)
- Maintain an active social media presence throughout major events, providing updates that can be shared on local and community Facebook pages
- Ensure life support customers are educated on how to be prepared for outages and the supports that are available to them in the event of an outage
- For SME's, explore options for updates to be sent to the person on the ground rather than the account holder
- Pre-storm communications and disaster resilience education may further support and empower customers in the lead up to, and during outages

Major business communications

- Explore feasibility of a business escalation point (e.g. major business with no account manager). Alternatively, consider an account manager for all major customers
- Like residential customers, review protocols or rules in place around estimated restoration time communications in natural disaster or emergency situations, ensuring there is some tolerance for ballpark timeframes to help set customer expectations

Stakeholder communications

- Ensure information flows through established emergency management groups group, rather than TasNetworks creating or establishing another structure
- Avoid promoting any additional support, relief, recovery or evacuation centres that have not been triggered by an existing emergency management process.
- Amplify messages from councils and SES regarding relief, recovery or evacuation centres, rather than TasNetworks initiating this support or producing TasNetworks content
- Collaborate with local government and the established emergency management working groups, to create a structured response plan for storm events and resulting recovery centres, including triggers for a particular response, and the type of response required
- Consider collaborative efforts, triggered in an emergency situation, where local government could provide support to TasNetworks in vegetation clearing, once safe.
- Explore opportunities for distributing more relevant information to stakeholders e.g. estimated restoration per suburb/town, filtered by municipality; information for community organisations looking after vulnerable customers who may also be impacted and potentially at increased risk

Media role and responsibilities

- In a natural disaster event, it is not appropriate for TasNetworks to lead the emergency response in the media. Instead, the Premier, SES, or Police should lead, and essential services (TasNetworks, TasWater etc.) called upon to comment on their area of expertise
- Information distributed via the media is most effective when locally nuanced. Use local or regional radio and television networks to share relevant information

Introduction

Background and objectives

In late August, a severe weather front (later declared a natural disaster by the Tasmanian and Australian Government) impacted the entire State of Tasmania for an unprecedented period of five consecutive days. During the storm, a record number of customers were without power, and some were also without access to telecommunications services.

Unlike previous weather events, the entire State was affected, with severe winds particularly impacting remote regions in the south, west and the north-west. Due to the severity of the storms and the safety hazards it created, some remote communities experienced outages of up to 20 days before restoration could safely occur.

This Post Incident Customer Experience (CX) Review aimed to understand customer and stakeholder experiences, and their perceptions of TasNetworks' communications performance during the storm event and throughout the recovery process. The Post Incident CX review explores:

- Customer and stakeholder information needs during outage events
- Perceptions of TasNetworks' communications performance (effectiveness, usefulness, timeliness) during the recent storm
- Information channel performance throughout the duration of the storm and recovery period, including the website, SMS, social media, the call centre and in the case of Stakeholders and large businesses, TasNetworks stakeholder and account management teams
- Learnings for how TasNetworks can improve communications with customers and stakeholders in future major outage events.

The outcomes of the review will inform potential improvements to processes and systems to increase support for Tasmanian communities during prolonged emergency events. The Post Incident CX Review learnings will be incorporated into a wider organisational review of the event.

Consultation approach

Qualitative research was used for this Review, including small group discussions with customers and SME's and one-on-one interviews with vulnerable customers, stakeholders and large businesses. This approach enabled open sharing of experiences and a constructive forum for reflecting on what worked well in terms of TasNetworks communication throughout the outage, and what can be learnt for future events. Recruitment screeners and discussion guides were collaboratively designed and approved by TasNetworks prior to use.

Distribution customers

Distribution customers (including residential, SME and life support) were engaged through a series of face-to-face focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Each participating customer received an incentive: $100 for residential customers who participated in a focus group ($80 for an in-depth interview), and $160 for business customers. 86 customers provided feedback to support the Review. Focus groups were held as follows.

#	Region	Location	Group	Date	Time	Moderator
1	North-west	Devonport	Residential	Tuesday 8/10	5:30pm	David Spicer
2		Devonport	SME (mixed)	Thursday 17/10	7:30pm	Katelyn Kemp
3		Burnie	Residential	Monday 30/09	5:30pm	Sarah Zanker
4		Stanley	Residential	Tuesday 1/10	5:30pm	
5		Zeehan	Mix resi and SME	Wednesday 2/10	5:30pm	
6		Queenstown	Mix resi and SME	Thursday 3/10	5:30pm	
7	North	Launceston	Residential	Wednesday 9/10	5:30pm	David Spicer
8		Launceston	SME (mixed)	Wednesday 9/10	7:30pm	
9		Scottsdale	Residential	Thursday 10/10	5:30pm	
10	South	Hobart	Residential	Wednesday 9/10	5:30pm	Sarah Zanker
11		Hobart	SME (mixed)	Wednesday 9/10	7:30pm	
12		Huonville	Residential	Thursday 10/10	5:30pm	

Vulnerable customers or those unable to travel, participated through a series of 60-minute in-depth interviews facilitated online via MS Teams, or phone.

Major customers and large businesses

This report incorporates the views of 9 representatives from major business customers, who participated in a series of 60-minute one-on-one interviews. These interviews included representation from major industrial customers, generators, and a mix of managed and un-managed business customers.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders include representatives from Local and State Government, Community Support Agencies, industry bodies (e.g. TasFarmers) and the Minister's Office.

This report incorporates the views from 12 stakeholders who participated in a series of 60-minute one-on one interviews, and one small group discussion with representatives from the SES. All sessions were facilitated via MS Teams.

Geographic reach of the consultation program

The geographical reach of the program was extensive. Face to face sessions were held across the following locations:
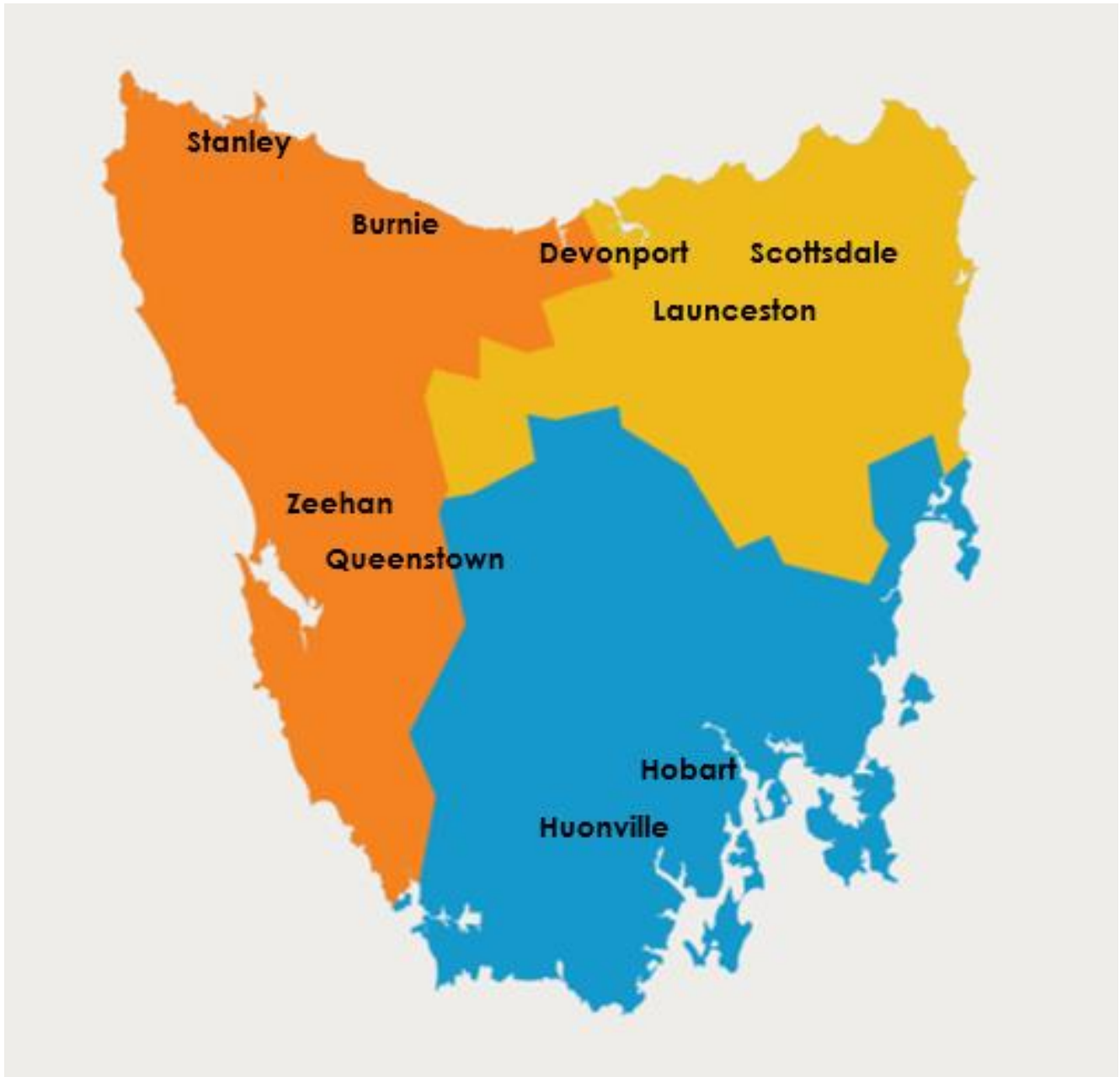
Total customer and stakeholder numbers for each region are outlined below:

	North-West	North	South
Distribution customers	57	15	14
Major businesses	2	4	3
Stakeholders	4	4	4
TOTAL	**63**	**23**	**21**

Lines of enquiry

Questions asked across each audience were similar, and covered the following areas of exploration:

Introductions and outage experiences

- Introductions and summary of how customers were impacted during the storm event and subsequent power outages (including length of outage and how customers managed throughout)
- Perceptions of how this storm event compared to previous storm events

Information needs and channels

- Information sources consulted throughout the outage and the restoration process
- Information sought and received from TasNetworks throughout the outage and recovery efforts
- Timeliness, accuracy, usefulness of channels, along with potential areas for improvement for each channel. The following channels were explored for each audience type:
  - Residential and SME customers: Website, SMS, call centre, social media and all other sources consulted
  - Major businesses: Account manager and all other sources consulted
  - Stakeholders: Stakeholder manager and all other sources consulted

Other support systems accessed

- Throughout the outages and while the recovery efforts were underway, a range of additional support services were set up to give people access to power. Often these were through Councils, but sometimes they were set up by community groups.
- What are some of the examples you saw of community groups, Councils or other organisations providing support to people impacted by extended power outages?
- Where you aware of any additional support services TasNetworks provided? If not, what could they have done to support (beyond outage rectification)?
- Did you access any support options like this? What support did you access? How come?
  - What worked well? What helped you? How so?
  - How could these supports be improved in future storm events like this? What could've supported you, and those around you, better?

- What can TasNetworks learn from these examples that they could consider for future storm events?
- For vulnerable and life support customers: Did TasNetworks or any other organisations provide you with access to back up generators or other back up sources of power?
  - How was this experience for you? What worked well? What could improve this experience in the future? Did you appreciate this wider support – was it of value?

Media

- Understanding of which organisation lead communications with the public through the media
- TasNetworks performance keeping the community updated via the media
- Expectations of TasNetworks role/responsibility in keeping the community updated via the media in future natural disaster or major outage events

Contextual findings

The storm event

It was widely agreed that this storm event was the worst in Tasmania, in living memory.

Communities were impacted differently, with some experiencing short or overnight outages, and others experiencing extended, multi-day outages to power and for some, telecommunications (landline, mobile and internet) services.

The storm not only caused widespread outages, but left a trail of destruction, with trees, roads and other infrastructure impacted. In more remote communities, access issues also compounded the delays in restoration and impacted the ability to purchase fuel to power generators.

The impacts to customers throughout storm events are felt differently.

For residential customers throughout the storm, the priority was to keep frozen and refrigerated items cold, as many spoke of having multiple freezers full of food. Similarly, it was about keeping warm as the storm hit throughout winter and most rely on electricity for heating. As the storm eased, many made more trips throughout the day to visit and check in on loved ones or older family members. Some also made trips for showers, for work and for reprieve from the outages they experienced at home.

Ensuring mobile devices remain charged was also an important consideration for customers as this is a primary point of connection to family and friends, enabled many to remain working remotely (if access issues prevented them leaving home), and allowed them to keep up to date with the storm event and impacts.

The outreach that occurred organically within communities and families is important to note. Many customers spoke of reaching out to family members to check how they were, and to see if they needed anything. For some elderly people, younger family members became a critical, and sometimes sole, information source.

> "We were the lucky ones. We only lost power for 5-10 minutes, then it was just flickers. We knew people who were out for 3-4 days. We sent them text messages to see if they needed our support."
>
> **Residential customer - Devonport**

For SME's, the impacts are more pronounced. Often these businesses were not only managing outages at home, but also at work. Considerations and concerns vary greatly depending on the type of business and therefore the impacts experienced. While very few experienced substantial losses of revenue, many were commonly frustrated in their efforts to work out the implications of the outages for their businesses, and a lack of available information regarding restoration times further increased this uncertainty and therefore frustration.

SME's in accommodation needed to cancel customer reservations and employee shifts, another, an ice cream shop, was concerned for keeping stock frozen. Another SME ran a business with multiple sites, some unstaffed, and an hour's drive apart. He could not determine which sites had power via any of TasNetworks communications channels (SMS, website, call centre), resulting in a two-hour round-trip to check for himself.

> "So there's the main site in Launceston, then two unmanned sites out of town. All I wanted to know was if the power was on at the unmanned sites – it's a one and a half hour round-trip in the storm for me to go and check. I called the helpline, waited 40 minutes and gave up. Drove out there myself."
>
> **SME customer**

Life support customers are also impacted differently, where knowing how long an outage will last is critical in enabling these customers to plan for their health throughout the outage. Understanding even a broad potential length for the outage would have supported these customers to find somewhere else to sleep, to go somewhere to keep warm, or get a meal, or even to seek medical aid at a hospital.

While they were reluctant to admit needing additional or special treatment, life support customers do require additional support or communication if an outage is going to last more than several hours as there is more they need to plan, and for many, the health consequences are potentially significant.

> "I'll just have to sleep without it [CPAP machine]. I had to wait until I was so tired that I just conked out. I didn't sleep at all the first two nights and by the third and fourth nights I was just really exhausted. But I still woke up a lot… I called everywhere to try and find a battery pack, but there weren't any anywhere. There had been some, but they had been snapped up very fast. I only just got the call yesterday –because I thought I was going to buy one ready for next time – and it was $339… It's too much."
>
> **Life support customer**
>
> "I'm on life support, so I need to be on an oxygen concentrator for 15 hours out of 24 hours a day. The thing is, we have to buy a generator to make sure that I don't miss out on that machine. Because times before when the power's gone out, my husband's rung TasNetworks and they said that if it gets to the stage where you need oxygen, they're not able to do it, you'll need to go to hospital. That's not a viable thing because hospitals these days, you need to wait hours and it wouldn't be termed as an absolute emergency, because everyone on life support, can you imagine if all of them went to the hospital. So, we're going to have to buy a generator… they [TasNetworks] more or less said that we need to sort things out ourselves."
>
> **Life support customer**
>
> "I'm 78 years old… I should have gone to hospital… but I got too proud. When I got too cold I just jumped in my car."
>
> **Life support customer**

Customers were grateful to crews who restored power quickly under challenging circumstances.

Given the severity of the storm and the destruction it caused, customers were not surprised to be impacted by outages to power and other services. They were also understanding of the task ahead of TasNetworks, acknowledging the risks to field crews and their ability to respond to outages safely, and in a timely manner, given the significance of the storm. Customers and stakeholders repeatedly

expressed their gratitude to TasNetworks field crews for their hard work in restoring power in a timely manner.

> "Yes, its inconvenient for us and yes, I was worried bout the food in the freezer. But you think of the crews. Out there in that storm, 12 hour shifts. No one should question whether they were doing everything they could in awful circumstances."
>
> **Residential customer - Launceston**

Audience differences observed

While the feedback on communications was generally consistent across the consultation process, several audience-based differences were observed, ranging from different expectations of TasNetworks, and different impacts experienced throughout the storm and resulting outages.

Major city centres (Hobart, Launceston and Devonport)

The inconvenience was experienced (or perhaps expressed) in a more pronounced way in major centres, with frustrations with a need to change plans (e.g. Father's Day breakfasts) more readily shared by some.

While the reliance on the network isn't necessarily greater at an individual customer level in these locations, there is a lower tolerance for outages, and particularly for longer or repeated outages. For some, the frustration expressed for this event was magnified due to a wider irritation of having experienced multiple outages outside of storm events, with little clarity as to why, and a lack of confirmation that the problem will be solved.

The expectations for TasNetworks communications were also higher. Some understood, working for larger organisations, that when there is a major event, it is incredibly difficult, and empathy was felt for team members in the call centre fielding calls from frustrated customers. They did expect, however, that maintaining the website (at a minimum) would have been viable for TasNetworks given the access they expect TasNetworks to have to technology and digital solutions. Similarly, notifications via SMS should are expected to be timely, accurate and appropriate in tone.

Burnie

Customers in Burnie had a limited understanding of the difference between TasNetworks and Aurora. Those who did reach out for help, were often unsure as to whether they contacted Aurora or TasNetworks, however were aware that they retrieved the phone number from a recent bill.

They felt strongly that making the community more aware of TasNetworks role would be helpful, so they know who to contact in case of outages. Fridge magnets, or education within customer bills were suggested.

Stanley

Customers in Stanley were very familiar with TasNetworks, know your CEO by name and were quite across the industrial relations issues (and required constant refocusing back to the storm), none of this was even mentioned in Burnie.

They are very used to outages, and for some, quite long outages of several days – there's a resilience to them, they cope, they understand, but they are frustrated by the decision to close the nearby depot, previous repeated and long outages and a perceived lack of maintenance in the area that makes infrastructure more vulnerable to weather events and wind (which is common in Stanley).

Zeehan

There is a significant frustration within the Zeehan community about vegetation management and clearances around powerlines in the region. Customers in Zeehan recalled frequent outages being caused by trees (in wind/storms etc.) and expressed strongly that far harsher clearances are required to reduce the risk to the network, and by extension, the number and duration of outages experienced by the community. While they understand that these clearance levels might not be set by TasNetworks, this issue is important to customers in Zeehan, and they expect TasNetworks to advocate for larger clearances around powerlines.

Like Stanley, customers in Zeehan held concerns for the lack of local field crews. While they understood that workers may need to travel to assess the situation, they suggested storing backup stocks of critical equipment here (e.g. poles) to enable quicker restoration of power. There was a belief that field crews drive from Burnie and assess the situation, then they have to return to Burnie for supplies. They felt that storing additional supplies in Zeehan may facilitate quicker restoration.

Due to access issues and the power outage impacting the service station, Zeehan was also cut off from fuel supplies for some time, meaning generators could only be used until personal diesel stocks were depleted. There was no fuel for generators until power, or access to the town via main roads had been restored.

Queenstown

Somewhat unique to Queenstown is the persistent telecommunications and television instability, outside of storm events. Throughout the storm event, many, in addition to power, lost mobile phone, internet services and television reception.

Customers also described people in Queenstown as having lower digital or technological literacy, highlighting the need to share information through offline channels and consider how people who are impacted by telco outages may receive important messages.

Many in Queenstown experienced a 'brown out' lasting several days, which prompted uncertainty regarding which appliances should or shouldn't be used and concern for potential risks of appliances being damaged as the power was considered less stable. There wasn't a consistent source of truth or knowledge around appliance use in the case of a brown out.

The sense of 'local' and mobilizing locally was strong in Queenstown. The west coast is perceived as a secondary thought compared to capital cities, so there was a desire to support one another, but limited mechanisms to facilitate this. As an example, one participant spoke to the SES and asked what she could do to help and got turned away. Community resilience programs or models could be piloted in Queenstown where there is some desire for self-enablement.

Huonville

The main difference observed in Huonville, was a lack of clarity around how some parts of the town can have power restored, while other parts remain without power. Customers in Huonville are resilient and able to cope for a period without power, however this was a key point of confusion.

Scottsdale

Scottsdale residents demonstrated some of the greatest empathy for crews working on the restoration, which many crew members known to participants in the focus group. These residents also demonstrated a far greater knowledge of energy infrastructure worked in their community, including which lines fed which streets and suburbs. This knowledge provided some reassurance as these residents understood why some parts of town had power and some did not, even if they were very close together. Understand both the 'why' and what needed to be done to restore power placed Scottsdale residents in a better head space during the event than residents of larger cities.

Life support customers

Knowing how long an outage will last is even more critical for life support customers. While reluctant to admit to needing special treatment, these customers require additional support if an outage is going to last more than a day, as there is more that they need to plan for.

Most life support customers mentioned that they were 'priority', but there was confusion around what that means. They believe that if their power goes out, TasNetworks has a responsibility to restore

supply quickly, but many were unaware of any other specific support they may have access to as a life support customer.

None of those interviewed received back up power sources from TasNetworks or others. One or two attempted to secure a back-up power supply, however they were all gone/sold/unavailable due to high demand in the storm. While most agreed it is not TasNetworks responsibility to fund these, there was an expectation that there should be education or support from TasNetworks for customers to access this backup power. Preparedness for outages among life support customers was quite low. Some rushed out to buy generators and battery banks, though few had them at the ready, despite experiencing multiple outages over time.

In cases where their equipment is highly critical for much of the day/night, rebates on generators were suggested. One customer who uses an oxygen concentrator 14-16 hours a day called TasNetworks for support, was told that no support is available, and to instead purchase herself a generator.

There is value in TasNetworks informing life support customers about what support is available through TasNetworks in outage events, and how they can take steps to be prepared themselves in the event of an outage.

Small to medium enterprises (SME's)

Generally SME's had similar views and experiences to residential customers. None experienced substantial losses of revenue, though were commonly frustrated in their efforts to work out the implications of the outages for their businesses. Specifically, estimated restoration information would have been useful in contingency planning.

SME's agreed it would have been extremely helpful have timely information around when power goes out (because they aren't always at their place of business during the outage and some operate at different hours of the day) and expected restoration times to help them put plans in place. They also don't necessarily have the time to be seeking out information (as there is usually a lot to do to manage the outage) so need information delivered to them if possible.

There was a suggestion that SMS notifications be sent to the people on the ground in the business, as for some, the person who manages the account (and who might manage several accounts) isn't the one who will have to deal with the outage.

Distribution customer experience: Communications and response

Customer information needs and sources

Critical information needs

There are two critical information needs for distribution customers

During a major outage event, the information needs for customers are extremely clear. **They need to know that TasNetworks is aware of the outage**, and **when power is expected to be restored**.

TasNetworks awareness of the outage is the first important information need.	Most sought to confirm TasNetworks awareness of the outage either through the website or the call centre. While for some it was assumed that TasNetworks would know (in the case of damaged electricity infrastructure), others felt a sense of accomplishment in making TasNetworks aware of the outage via the website.
Restoration timing is critical information. It helps set customer expectations and allows planning and preparation for the duration of the outage.	This is particularly true in the case of longer outages, and helps customers understand whether they need generators, or what contingency plans they should be enacting for their household or business. This might involve relocating to a family member or friends place (with power), or whether they should be turning on, or purchasing generators. For small to medium sized businesses, this may mean cancelling staff for the day (or longer) or cancelling customer bookings in the case of accommodation providers.

Unfortunately for customers who sought this information, it wasn't always readily/easily available (online or via the call centre), nor was it proactively communicated (via SMS).

Customers sought more frequent communications from TasNetworks, even if unknown initially

While customers were incredibly understanding of the pressures TasNetworks (field crews and communications teams) were under, there was a notable lack of communications and updates throughout the outage period. Those who sought information were generally dissatisfied with the information provided from TasNetworks and were felt as though they were both literally and figuratively left 'in the dark'.

Customers understood and accepted that an estimated restoration time may not be known initially, however agreed that communications to help set expectations, even if vague/broad is more helpful than no communications. Customers were more comfortable receiving a broad timeframe – even if overstated – so they could prepare and plan accordingly. This was particularly relevant for customers who experienced long outages.

Reflecting on the outage event and communications received, some customers felt strongly that communications has been better handled in past events (bushfire in 1981 was referenced) and were surprised and disappointed that with all the technology we now have access to, that more up to date information could not be provided. In the past there might've been more reliance on human-to-human communications – radio, neighbours etc (which are still important, particularly if telecommunications services are impacted), however technology is perceived to have mostly replaced some of the human-to-human communications, and there was a belief that the technology in this case either did not work, or did not work quick enough.

> "Obviously this one was big, they aren't all going to be 3-4 day outages, but if you are looking at an extended period outage, a 'we expect to get to yours within 24-36 hours', no worries so I know I might as well go to a hotel or someone else's house so I know I will be in the dark for 2 days."

Life support customer

> "I got the SMS and it had an estimate – I think it said 12 hours or something. At first I was annoyed, and thought 'why so long, this isn't a big job'. Then I thought 'at least they're being honest'. Turns out the power came back on after ten hours. Better to be conservative, I guess."

Residential customer - Launceston

Primary information sources

TasNetworks website is expected to be the single source of truth

The TasNetworks website is expected to be the single source of truth regarding updates throughout major outage events, with customers generally checking the website several times a day during an outage. Other sources consulted included:

- **Social media:** Specifically local community Facebook pages in each town or suburb. Examples included 'Launnie Chit Chat', 'West Coast Road Conditions' and 'What's Happening on the West Coast'. Note, social media is a widely consulted platform for community led information sharing, and those without access to social media (due to mobile/internet outages) or those who don't use social media, felt far less connected to updates compared to those using social media.

  These social media channels were predominantly used to keep track of which areas were without power, and to help predict when power may be restored. It also provided a community led way to provide support – many examples were provided of neighbours and community members welcoming people into their homes to charge devices or have hot showers, as well as promoting local government support in the community.

- **Neighbours, family members and friends** in the area: Other community members were a common source of information. Accuracy, however, was questionable as without up-to-date information provided via the website (as the single source of truth), much speculation and stories spread throughout towns.

- In Hobart, Launceston and Devonport, **Pulse Tasmania** (usually via Facebook) was also mentioned as a reference point.

- **TasALERT App:** Some participants preferred to use TasALERT for information in storms. The interactive maps were thought to be more useful, and participants recalled that the site provided information about crews in different areas.

- **Local radio stations:** For those with access to a battery radio, or particularly on the West Coast, local radio was a source of information. Local radio (often ABC) was prioritised over major stations to ensure the information consumed was about local efforts and restoration timeframes, rather than focusing on progress in major centres.

Information access was further limited for customers impacted by mobile/internet outages

Locations including Zeehan and Queenstown also experienced telecommunications outages, and when coupled with poor television reception, meant their ability to access information was restricted even further. To stay informed, some used local radio, or spoke to neighbours and others in the community once the storm had subsided. While TasNetworks could have communicated online or via SMS with customers in these regions, they wouldn't have necessarily received it or received it in a timely manner.

"We were in a bubble – we had no idea whether TasNetworks knew about the outage, or whether anyone was working to restore it. When we did finally get access to the news, after power was restored, we had no idea of the damage."

Residential customer - Queenstown

"We obviously had no power, but once the mobile phone service was gone we had no internet and we had no actual way of accessing the website to check and get any information. So I think having that having that ABC as the emergency station that you know you can go to as well [is good]."

SME customer

TasNetworks communications performance across key channels

Importantly, while the channels TasNetworks have/use are the right channels, a lack of updates impacted their usefulness as a method for keeping customers informed and up to date on the outage and recovery process. A review of the performance of each channel is provided below and on the following pages.

Website

Customers agreed that the website should be the single source of truth for up-to-date information on outages (outage locations, number of customers impacted) and the estimated restoration times.

Website: Successes

- **TasNetworks has a user-friendly website and the outage map is well received:** The website was typically reliable in communicating the number, distribution and impact of outages. The outage map was consistently well-liked and used. It enabled customers to see which streets/sections of streets/suburbs are impacted, and allowed people to check on their neighbours, friends and family members and organise support for them if needed. Similarly, the outage map was useful for understanding where outages extended to, and therefore where refuge could be sought, whether through family/friends, local businesses or the local community. Customers widely acknowledged that the website performed poorly during the storm event.

- **Reporting is straightforward:** Outages are easily reported, and some appreciated the ability to report, and register for updates on behalf of others. One customer was able to report his outage, and the outage of his two sons, who lived 'over the road', on their behalf, along with register them all for updates. There are pain points for customers with the timeliness of reported outages appearing online, which are explored in the learnings section.

- **The 'register for updates' function:** Customers preference is for up-to-date information available on TasNetworks website, and further updates automatically pushed out to customers via SMS (opt-out rather than opt-in). In lieu of this, the register for updates function (in theory) minimises the need to continuously re-check the website for updates. The feature is positive (again, in lieu of automatic updates provided without having to register) however functionality was sub-optimal throughout the storm and outage event.

> "So in terms of something that's helpful or handy on the website is the map you mentioned being able to see, I guess, how widespread the outage is, the Pap smear particular streets, if you've got family members and people that you might want to check on."
>
> **Residential customer - Hobart**

Website: Learnings

- **The website was not kept up to date, and consistently failed to answer customers' most critical question – 'when will my power be restored?'.** Most were constantly informed the status was 'to be determined' or 'under investigation' and some were told to expect 'long delays'. Others were

instructed to 'check back at 4pm', with this message presented at all times of the day and night, and for multiple days in a row. Almost no customer could attain an estimated restoration time, the key piece of information sought.

- **Customers desire even a broad estimate of restoration time, to manage their expectations.** This was not provided, and customers were left unsure as to whether to expect 1-hour, 1-day, or 1-week without power. Even if this information is unknown early into the outage, customers expect to be updated when TasNetworks have more clarity on when the problem will be looked at and what an estimated time of restoration will be.

- **The website was often inaccurate, or slow to be updated as power was restored.** Many examples were provided that highlight the inaccuracies or delays in updating the website. In just one example, an outage was restored, then soon after, another outage occurred, but the website hadn't updated to reflect that the first one had been resolved, and so customers were unable to reliably report the new outage. In another example, the website showed that power had been restored, when in fact it was off.

  These examples called into question the effectiveness of communications between the field crews completing jobs, and the website reflecting that work. It broke down trust in the system and the benefits of reporting outages and was perceived as being quite a dated approach, and surprising given the amount of technology customers presumed TasNetworks have access to.

- **There was a delay between a customer reporting an outage, and the outage appearing online, creating uncertainty, frustration and for some, cynicism.** Outage 'reporters' described frustration with the time delay between reporting an outage and the outage appearing on the website. Some described waiting up to four hours for the outage to be reflected online and for a somewhat cynical few, prompted suspicion around the delay being a tactic to minimise Guaranteed Service Level payments.

- **All other channels directed customers to the website, further fuelling the frustration.** Compounding this issue, communications from the media, and via SMS and social media also directed customers to check the website for more information, which was not available, further adding to the frustration of customers.

- **Lack of 'paper trail' or point in time updates on the website.** There was a strong desire for more of a paper trail or timestamped record of updates on the TasNetworks website for outages (some likened it to how the ABC share online updates of an issue), to prove that information is being reviewed and updated regularly throughout an outage. A commitment to updates at a designated time must also be delivered on, to build trust and confidence. In the recent outage event, no information timestamps to indicate when the last update was provided, nor indication of when the next update would be provided.

  As an example, a customer recalled Tasmania Fire communications throughout the 2019 bushfire, where updates were consistently provided half-hourly. Customers expect that TasNetworks has similar, if not better technology in 2024 to be providing updates at a regular cadence (6-hourly).

"I received a notification telling me the power was out, which I already knew, but no estimate of when it might come back on. So I went to the website to see if there was an estimate there. Thing is, according to the website my power was still on … which it wasn't … so not only was it wrong but there was no estimate of reconnection because according to them the power never went out. I just gave up."

Residential customer - Launceston

> "All the website said was either 'check back in something-something timeframe' or 'expect long delays'. You check back when you are told and nothing has changed. How long is a long delay anyway? Hours … days … weeks?"

Residential customer - Devonport

> "I came into work, might've opened the app to look at my own house, and then Wynyard – to understand what was happening at the factory. It was not what I expected, the map wasn't indicating what it should've been."

Major business

> "Contrast this (lack of notifications) to other providers I have. Say TasWater. They are constantly notifying me of things, they just love their notifications. Water will be out here between this hour and that. Planned works in this area. Nothing like TasNetworks."

Residential customer - Launceston

In the absence of a provided restoration time, customers sought more information to help set their expectations as to when power may be restored

For some, knowing where crews currently are provides some indication of when power may be restored, even if vague. Tasmania Fire was used as an example of this, where, in a bushfire, people can see how many resources/assets have been deployed, which provides an indication of the severity of the fire.

Without an indication of when power may be restored, customers felt they could use the location and number of field crews as a quasi-indicator of whether their outage was being attended to, and therefore that their outage may soon be resolved. Ultimately, customers were trying to build a picture in their minds about how long it'll be until they have power.

It is important to note that this information was only requested because the website failed to answer their most critical question of 'when will my power be restored?' nor did it provide a reliable indication of when this question may be answered.

This feedback should be caveated with a consideration for the risks of providing customers with access to this information. There is a risk that knowing where crews are, prompts customers to approach field crews for information, introducing safety risk, and taking time of field crews from their important role of restoring power.

> "So my thing with it is, like the communication systems are fine, it's about the delivery and the timeliness, because the thing is, we know when the power's back because the power's back, and we know when the power's out because it's out. So, like, we don't need a text way too late stuff. It's more around, like, how long is it going to be out for? You know, that's the main thing. When we're on the website, it's the same thing. If it goes out, we know it's out, but there's nothing on the website. And then later on, it says, oh, estimated time - check back delay is expected. None of that's helpful to me. I just want to know - either 'we don't know or we do, and it's this much time'. Not knowing anything is torture."

Residential customer - Hobart

> "It always takes quite some time for it to be reflected. So I just kind of at this point, I'm so jaded by my experiences with them, I just go, okay, whatever. This is part for the course."

Residential customer - Hobart

"Yes, and you know when the news is six hours old, check back at 4pm that's nothing but frustrating. So if at least it was every hour it's 'we still have no news for you'. You know that they're looking at it at least an active site, and it would be nicer to know that you know that crews are working. But it's the frustration when there is no news."

Residential customer – Hobart

"The website was showing that power was on in areas where it clearly wasn't."

Residential customer – Zeehan

"They've got all this technology with smart meters and everything else. Why can't they use that to accurately show what's going on?"

Residential customer – Zeehan

SMS

SMS: Successes

- **Many received notification of TasNetworks awareness of the outage.** While not overly memorable, many customers received an SMS stating that TasNetworks was aware of their outage and to check the website for updates. While customers were reassured on receipt of this SMS, some quickly became frustrated that the website did not in fact provide further information. Despite providing no indication of restoration time, the relatively 'content-free' SMS notification was still appreciated and reassured customers that TasNetworks was aware and would act on it.

- **Some received an SMS notification confirming power restoration.** This communication was quite timely (especially in comparison to the initial SMS), typically within 30-60 minutes of power restoration. Importantly, many did not receive this notification, and it appeared to happen more for customers in major centres (Launceston, Hobart, Devonport), rather than those in rural areas.

- **Community-centric messaging was well received.** Though rare, a small number of customers recalled messaging encouraging people to 'check on your neighbours', which was thoughtful and appreciated.

SMS: Learnings

- **Many received no SMS communications from TasNetworks during the outage or post-restoration, and believed SMS notifications and updates should be opt-out by default.** Customers highlighted a lack of proactive SMS updates throughout the outage, which was surprising as some were usually notified during other unplanned outages. Almost all customers were supportive of an 'opt-out by default' approach, with updates provided as soon as new information is known – particularly linked to restoration time. It was an additional pain point that customers must visit the website and opt in for updates, believing instead it should be automatic SMS for outages like this.

- **SMS communications were often very delayed.** Customers expressed frustration at receiving notification of TasNetworks awareness of the outage 3-4 hours following the beginning of the outage. As an example, one customer, who lost power at 11pm, described getting an SMS at 7:30am the following morning, alerting him to the power being out. This caused significant frustration and suggested either slow and underperforming communications and technology, or more cynically, a tactic to avoid Guaranteed Service Level payments – neither of which were acceptable to customers.

- **Customers expect an update if there is a change to estimated restoration time.** They appreciated and understood that situations can rapidly change and that TasNetworks must triage outages and respond accordingly. A lack of updates was less acceptable to customers, than multiple updates with adjustments to estimated restoration time. Most important was keeping customers up to date.

- **Longer outages may warrant a scheduled update, even if no change:** In addition, in the event of very long outages (days), customers expect a frequency to the updates, such as a commitment to a 6-hourly update so customers remain informed. Even if nothing has changed, it reassures customers that TasNetworks are acting.

- **SMS directed customers to the website, which was not up-to-date.** This created great frustration and questioned the direction if the website was not kept up to date.

- **SMS content could be refined in major outage events.** The initial notification satisfies one major information need – confirmation that TasNetworks is aware of the outage. Feedback from customers suggested the SMS reads 'there's an outage at your address', which came across as somewhat patronising, with some of the more frustrated customers suggesting alternate language such as 'we're aware of the outage impacting your address and are working on it'. SMS communications should also highlight when customers can expect the next update.

- **SMS confirming TN awareness of the outage is a useful step.** knowing that you know about it (via SMS) would be a very helpful and reassuring step

"The communication is pretty consistently terrible. We got a text message at 730 on Sunday saying the power's gone. And I'm like, Yeah, okay, that's eight hours later… Yeah, so the comms are routinely terrible, and then the power came back on, and then we got a text after that. So, like, it's literally pointless, and also it makes it seem like that's a four hour window when it actually has been like 12 plus hours."

Residential customer - Hobart

"When you register for outage SMS, making sure updates are more frequent (e.g. every 4 or 6 hours), so you know when to expect an update, and adding that into the updates 'We will send another update in 4 or 6 hours' or whatever it might be so people know what to expect."

Life support customer

"In Ben's perfect world, this would be the case. 'Hey, Ben. We know the power's off. Don't stress, we're working on it, and it's going to take probably this amount of time'. And then when that time frame changes, or they have a bit more information about, like, a more accurate picture, then I get another update. Yeah, that's it. That makes sense."

Residential customer - Hobart

Call centre

Many contacted the call centre to receive information they were unable to gain online or through another source. While the call centre team were largely friendly given the circumstances, customers experienced:

- Long wait times to receive information, often while watching their mobile phone battery rapidly decreasing (45-minutes was a common wait time mentioned)

- An inability to receive the information they wanted (estimated restoration time)

- A frustrating wait through the pre-recorded message, only to be told that the restoration time is still to be confirmed

- No escalation point was provided for customers in a more critical or urgent situation, or where the need to raise a nuanced scenario was required (e.g. major business with no account manager, dairy farmer requiring power for milking).

While customers expected to glean more information around restoration times from the call centre, the experience suggests the call centre had no greater access to information than what was available on the website. This point was not highlighted to customers at any stage throughout the pre-recorded message.

For many, the call centre was seen as almost a 'last resort' if they couldn't obtain information through other means. If communications via the website and SMS were improved, there is potential that this could reduce the volume of people attempting to contact the call centre.

> "It was a lovely chat with no useful information."
>
> **SME customer**
>
> "They were helpful without actually being able to do anything."
>
> **Life support customer**
>
> "I sat on hold for 40 minutes watching my phone's battery drain down and down with no way to charge it. Gave up after 40-45 minutes. I figured having battery for other things was more important that sitting on hold with TasNetworks."
>
> **Life support customer**

There was confusion for some over who to contacts, and an uncertainty as to whether a customer was contacting Aurora or TasNetworks. This is highlighted in the rare but real example below.

> "I think it was more frustrating that every time I rang them, they go, 'oh yes, we've got someone sorting that'. But you go to tell them that area, and they go, 'oh no, no, no, we'll get to that area soon'. And I said, 'well, it's been two and a half days'. And it was like they wanted to know, but they didn't really want to sort of deal with it. The way they spoke, was, I don't matter, but everyone else did, so I wasn't really impressed with them at the time. So I think their attitude towards people when they meet, like I can understand a lot of people would be frustrated and irritable, but they should never talk to their customers the way they did."
>
> **Residential customer – Burnie**

Field crews

While not an official channel for communications, the lack of information available via other sources occasionally prompted customers to approach field crews working in the area to understand when power was likely to be restored.

In smaller communities such as Scottsdale, members of the crews were generally well-known in the community. This led to a two way flow of information – ad-hoc/informal notifications from crews to community members, and updates of affected areas from community members to crews.

Customers understand that crews are focussed on safely restoring power (and that any interaction takes them away from this important job). However as one customer put it "not knowing is torture", and after tolerating outages for multiple days, without any indication of when power may be restored, several customers approached field crews seeking an estimated restoration time. This again highlights the importance of more frequent customer updates, even if vague initially. Two examples are provided below.

A positive customer experience:

> "A tree was down, over the powerlines… field crews came out and we got a knock on the door, and regular updates from the crew until it was fixed."
>
> **Residential customer – Hobart**
>
> "People know who is on the crews, if you've lived here long enough you probably went to school with them. They'd give us updates on what they are doing and you can even request that they attend to problems in such-and-such an area."
>
> **Residential customer – Scottsdale**

A less positive customer experience:

> "After a terrible experience on the call centre, where no information could be provided – I approached some workers… I was told I'm not their priority…"
>
> **Residential customer – Burnie**

There were also examples where customers (typically in smaller regional communities), personally knew employees of TasNetworks, and were able to get updates from them as to when they were working in the area and would likely be restoring power. Maintaining an up-to-date website and proactively notifying customers when new information is available (via SMS), will reduce the need for customers to interact with field crews in future outage events.

Social media

Social media is an important information source for customers, however this is typically via local community group pages rather than from following TasNetworks or other organisations. Just one person who participated in the consultation process actively 'followed' TasNetworks on Facebook. Most were unaware of TasNetworks presence on social media and didn't recall seeing information from TasNetworks through this channel, nor was it particularly needed, provided the website is updated.

Other relevant learnings

Pre-storm communications and disaster resilience education may further support and empower customers in the lead up to, and during outages.

With storm events typically forecast and communicated in advance, customers expressed a desire for pre-storm communications to raise awareness of the potential impacts (to essential services and infrastructure) and educate customers about how to prepare and respond to outages during storm events. Useful information might include:

- How storms can impact the network and how to prepare for outages (full or partial outages)
- Safety around fallen powerlines and how/where to report storm related network damage
- Education about a storm preparedness kit to support customers to cope throughout major events such as this (camp stove, battery radio, power banks etc)
- How to keep appliances safe throughout outage events
- A reminder to check in on vulnerable family members, friends or neighbours
- Where help can be sought if needed

This information could be through mass communications or advertising in the lead up to a storm event, or via targeted community resilience building activities, particularly in more isolated or areas potentially vulnerable to access issues.

Access to information is further limited for those with reduced mobile or internet access during major storm events.

TasNetworks could consider how to share information and updates with more remote communities impacted by telecommunications outages (mobile and internet). As the website is relied upon for the single source of truth, this information will be difficult to access for customers without internet coverage.

A framework or approach for communicating with these customers, and customers who may be less technologically or digitally literate, should be part of TasNetworks future planning processes. Stakeholders suggested a range of strategies which could be considered, these have been outlined further in this report.

Customer feedback for TasNetworks

In terms of TasNetworks communications throughout the outage and recovery process, what worked well?

- Local guys kept us informed and got us reconnected fast.

- ① You made the repairs. I guess eventually

- SMS — GOOD

- Visual map of state

- DID NOT DO ANYTHING WELL

- ✓ (circle) nil during outage.

- OPT-IN SMS NOTIFICATION. NOTIFICATION WHEN POWER HAS FULLY RESTORED (ALBEIT DELAYED)

- NOTHING LACK OF TARGET TARGETTED COMMUNICATION

- COMMS WELL WAS BEING ABLE TO USE FROM MOBILE NUMBER TO REGISTER

- Wayne, on the ground crew top job. Communication was poor at a local level

- - mapping of Data/Outages. - Fixed power in a timely manner on the weekend

- 1) They had a Map on the website. However → It wasn't up to Date

- THEY TOLD ME MY POWER WAS OUT AFTER I ALREADY KNEW

- Q1. - Restored power fairly quickly - Mentioned on the Tasnetworks site that power was out in Queenstown

- Initial Notification SMS

- #2 Fixing the power granting people an amnesty to get food

- GOOD STUFF • TEXT MESSAGE AT START OF OUTAGE • WEBSITE OUTAGE AREA GRAPHIC RELIABLE

- 1) Nothing - only 1 message, by then I knew that the power was off.

- Have a website is what they did well, send I feel that the power was out in my street

- Nothing

- Tas networks kept continuing updates to the public

- Sent one message to tell me my power was off.

- Good situation Maps

- Personally, power was restored reasonably quickly given the circumstances.

- SMS - reasonable time around to get power back up so close to ETA - safety of workers

- THEY DID WHAT THEY COULD TO FIX THE PROBLEM. BUT COMMUNICATION WAS POOR.

- NOT MUCH IN THE WAY OF letting us know. 1) Getting to fixing the problem.

- Restored Power eventually

- NOTHING THANK YOU THOUGH TO THE WORK CREWS!

- Did well Repairing what they could with the weather they were dealing with

- Communication Lack of inform in

- 1. THEY STARTED TO LEARN FOR IMPROVEMENT

- NOTHING

- I DONT KNOW what you DID well because I Never Herd From yous at all about the Power out.

- • Restored power as quick as possible • SMS ALERT • Asking to alert neighbors on SMS

- Only 1 message after the power was back on

- Not done well at all.

- Resolved power outage in my local area within 12 hrs

What could TasNetworks improve for future outage events?

UPDATE WEBSITE REGULARLY.

HAVE A PRESENCE IN AFFECTED AREAS. SO THAT PEOPLE WITHOUT MOBILE PHONES COULD SPEAK WITH SOMEBODY THE PHONE SYSTEM OF RECORDED MESSAGES IS NOT ENOUGH!

Communicate with high demand customers

real time update on website

TIMELY INFORMATION

Have somewhere for people to go to get a coffee, tea ect charge phones ect

Make sure update times are not passed without an update

CLEARER COMMUNICATION ACCURATE UPDATES & EXPECTED RESOLUTION TIMES.

BETTER ADHERENCE TO AUTOMATIC NOTIFICATIONS OF ISSUES. NOT JUST OUTAGES BUT ALSO POWER SUPPLY REDUCTIONS (BROWN-OUTS)

MORE FREQUENT UPDATES AS TO PROGRESS OF RESTORATION WORKS

BETTER WAYS OF DISTRIBUTING INFORMATION

REGULAR UPDATE @ SET TIMES

Let us know approximately how long power will be off. What area of power is out. utilise generic saves

EXPEDIENT UPDATE TO THEIR POWER OUTAGE WEBSITE

PASS INFO UPDATES TO LOCAL RADIO STATION.

Send SES out to exercise if anyone needed help.

2.) Could have sent out information about the power outages e.g. updates through Sms

2. Give useable info about where to go if you lose food due to

Q2.
- Restore power as soon as possible!
- Make information about where and when the power outage has occured and when it will be restored more easily accesable

NEED REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Better S.M.S. Notification System.
More Consise information.
More Pole & Wire Maint.

2.) Be timely and accurate.

* Lack of updates (SMS)
* Lack of updates (website)
* Lock of notification of POWER ON

Communicate!

Provide better assistance to special cases

#1 Send sms to every one #2

Act Proactively with maintenance

Make sure in future large outages, people are kept up to date on a regular basis.

Do Different is update website with estimated times/hours/days so we can prepare where to go & what to do.
Send more direct texts so you don't have to check website over and over again as you have little →

MORE TARGATED LOCAL TOWN INFORMATION
INFORMING PEOPLE APPROX TIME OF RESTORATION

WHAT COULD BE DONE BETTER
• REAL TIME UPDATES
• BETTER LOCAL PRESENCE QUICKER
• ACCURATE INFORMATION
• PROVIDE BETTER COMMUNITY SERVICE DURING & AFTER INCIDENTS

Communicate clearly via Text when power likely to be restored

2
Maintain their equipment to reduce outages
Pay their employees so they are happy to work for some

more communication required. Up dates. more regular

Restore maintenance crews in Smithton

MORE ABOUT letting us know when & how long it will take to FIX

preshorm warnings

poor up to date info on website/ social media

offer drop in centre to charge phones etc

offer credits for days lost on bills

• PROMOTE FACEBOOK & ANY OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

• TAKE AWAY (CHECK BACK) FROM UPDATES

EXPAND RESPONSES TO CLIENTS WITH SLIGHTER MORE INFORMATION THAN CURRENTLY RELEASED.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH NO POWER. HOW CAN YOU GET A MESSAGE THROUGH

Maintenance & Service before Profit.

- More accurate timings
- Clearer text communication eg. same info as website

- More Prompt Communication
- Expected Resolution Time.
- issue had been resolved.

Communicate what the situation was & possible time frame to resolve issue

Send out sms talk to Radio Station
send some one out and about

• ACCESS TO UPDATES
• CONTACT WITH A PERSON (SMS)
• TEXT INFO BASIC & WEBSITE ADVICE

Major business customer experience: Communications and response

Context

Representatives from major businesses were interviewed as part of the review process. In total, 8 major businesses provided feedback from major customers (account managed and unmanaged) and generators.

Many had an account manager or primary contact at TasNetworks (excluding unmanaged major customers), though information was also sourced and shared through:
- TasNetworks website
- TasALERT website and app
- Individual (unofficial) contacts within TasNetworks
- Local business networks, suppliers and other organisations

Some major businesses were impacted significantly by the ongoing industrial action, with tensions rising due to outages likely triggered by the storm event.

Some businesses experienced a circuit breaker trip (likely due to the wind/storm event), requiring a reset from TasNetworks' control room. Rather than any lack of communications, frustrations for these customers were due to 'union overstepping' preventing TasNetworks staff from performing a reset to restore power. This resulted in outages lasting several days and for some resulting in losses of revenue of over $1million.

While these organisations also experienced short, storm-related outages (due to lines down or vegetation), they were incredibly understanding of the situation, and had no concerns over how communications (via their account manager) were handled in these events.

The most significant concern was the control the unions had over TasNetworks control room and that it required legal intervention for power to be very quickly restored to these businesses. One expressed concern over potential scare tactics, receiving a call at one minute past midnight on the day the industrial action commenced, notifying them that in the event of something tripping, they may not be reconnected.

Some major businesses appreciated the forewarning of the industrial action and the proactive steps TasNetworks took to make them aware of the potential response implications.

While the impacts of the industrial action were not in scope in this review, major businesses were deeply impacted, more so than they were because of the storm, and these findings have therefore been included.

> "We lost power supply on Thursday midday. Because of the industrial action, the control room refused to restore power. This was when TasNetworks took it to Fair Work. Management received a call from Fair Work at 7:30pom the following Tuesday night and at 8:30 or 9pm, power was restored.
>
> Impact of that, was that we had to stop a supply chain. We made a decision, with no certainty of when power to be restored. We stopped the supply chain Friday morning. If I was to estimate, across the supply chain it would be 200-300 workers not working between Friday morning and Tuesday night.
>
> The storm event tripped the circuit breaker, but it wasn't like the power lines were down, it was just reset at the circuit breaker. It was a control room thing, not a field crews thing. Once we got the legal outcome, they restored the power."

Major business

"We shouldn't have been in a position where the union was dictating our movements in a control room. They wouldn't allow us to press a button. For TasNetworks to not have resource control of the control room, to instruct them to do what they should, TasNetworks have a failing in their preparedness to service customers."

Major business

"They were clear and consistent. They weren't trying to hide anything, they were up and down about the IA – they let me know, they were proactive, clear and transparent."

Major business

Supply chain considerations also impact major businesses

It is important for TasNetworks consider the supply chain environment major businesses exist within. Many major businesses also rely on small or medium local businesses to support their operations. Therefore, SME's impacted by outages can also cause impacts for major businesses. While there is shared understanding and negotiations made for resuming operations and catch-up work once power is restored, this is important context for TasNetworks to be mindful of.

While major businesses may receive proactive and direct updates from their account manager, the remainder of the supply chain was relying on TasNetworks channels for information, including the website and call centre, which did not always provide answers to the critical questions.

"Our business lost power for quite a bit of time. All our sub-suppliers are based in Bell Bay too. The consequences are – how were we getting supplies? We work on a just in time delivery model. We cant supply for a period of time without the support of these smaller sub-suppliers. They were getting nervous about whether they would be able to service us.

The upside of that was, the outcome was, Bell Bay businesses got together and supported one another. They get together, and we all understand, it's not good for everyone if someone isn't here.

From a comms perspective, we were taking interest in what TasNetworks was doing for the Bell Bay area, not just Bell Bay Aluminium."

Major business

Communications successes

Major businesses praised the responsiveness and dedication of their account manager within TasNetworks, and their solutions focus.

Major businesses typically had an account manager within TasNetworks, and beyond this, one or two further escalation points where required (Executive and CEO level contacts at TasNetworks). They praised the solutions-focused approach of their account manager, who provided suggestions to these businesses in terms of infrastructure assessment, and outage reporting wording, in order to attempt to restore power despite the ongoing industrial action.

The dedication of these team members was never questioned, and major businesses could not speak more highly of their responsiveness under considerable pressure and at almost all hours of the day and night. It was recognized widely that these team members worked tirelessly to keep stakeholders and customers as informed as possible, throughout the outage and recovery process.

"From a customer account point of view... [account manager]. The poor bugger, we worked him to death. He's probably got other clients as well. He was exceptional through the process. Available, responsive, to the point where at the end he needed to take time off to recharge. We were getting updates at midnight, 1am... he was available, responsive, turning Q&A around – there's only so much he can do... he was keeping comms going for us."

Major business

"If an outage like this, we reach out to our account manager, he becomes the interface. There's recognition of the outage, we get a best endeavour for resumption, and then a regular update for whether that's still a realistic timeframe. Helps us with planning resources – get an update – still 7th in line."

"Realistic comms, so not chasing and not feeling like you're forgotten. That's what you expect from a good account manager - being available keeping updated on progress."

Major business

"Our account manager - he worked endless hours, was even told he needed to take a break, he went above and beyond to keep us in the loop, juggle the information flow. I have no issues with him and never have."

Major business

"From the hydro point of view, having the multiple points of escalation is really good, especially in an emergency scenario. Knowing you have someone there as an escalation pathway, but also from fatigue management point of view. It's a 24/7 perspective. Knowing multiple people was good – and they were always willing to take our call."

"There was none of the – 'I'm busy, can't talk to you'. It felt like they recognised that we are an important customer, not only a big customer, but our role in the state in providing the state power. We can't do our job without them; they can't do theirs without us. They made sure they had time for us."

Major business

In storm related outages, TasNetworks typically responded quickly for major businesses, restoring power quickly and leaving customers satisfied with the experience.

Most major businesses who experienced a storm-related outage, where lines were down, were able to effectively cope with the impacts of the outage, and commended TasNetworks for keeping them informed and restoring power as quickly as they could. Major businesses were deeply understanding of the circumstances and conditions TasNetworks field crews were operating in.

"We're understanding, there are massive outages, it's 47,000 people… we were in the queue. It wasn't an issue that we prioritised thinking on. It was the industrial action one that was having the greatest impact on us. Others was a disruption, not an event. Hours, not days. Less than 24 hours. Which, given the event was understood. It was a non-issue for us."

Major business

"We had a line go down, it was physically damaged, there was 200 people, without power, in their rooms, in a mining town. It was out for a full afternoon, night and morning. Crew were busy – they got some priority and came to repair the line. They looked at it, couldn't fix it – needed to do some other work, but their fatigue hours had built up. They came back first thing. The crew itself went above and beyond. This one was safety – pure storm damage."

Major business

"I got called by a number of people, which was good. Got some good ideas from them too – they actually said, are we intending to charter a chopper to check the line, and if so, can they join us. And we did that, chartered a helicopter, got the TasNetwork guys, because they also needed to visually inspect the line. We couldn't drive to site because of the roads. We got a restoration time, after the chopper inspection – they needed a visual inspection before reenergisation."

Major business

Communications learnings

A lack of information provided about the estimated length of the outage (or potential restoration time) impacted the ability to plan for the duration of the outage. Major businesses also accessed the TasNetworks website, experiencing the same frustrations as residential and SME customers.

A key learning was that a lack of visibility over restoration times created ambiguity around how to effectively plan to support their business operations and continuity throughout the outage. These businesses spoke about a critical reliance on power to support operations, and that for some, several hours without power could be catastrophic to their business.

Most had virtually no idea how long they would be without power, and this lack of even an estimated or ballpark timeframe (e.g. 'it's likely to be a few days', or, 'we are looking like at least a week') meant they couldn't confidently enact contingency plans, which could have been around importing stock from the mainland, had a larger roster of people on standby for 24/7 monitoring of generators, or other business specific decisions to support a temporary reduction in operational capacity. Setting expectations as soon as possible is critical.

Many were accessing the TasNetworks website frequently, to try to gain some understanding of the likely outage length, however described the same delays, inaccuracies and inconsistencies compared to the real experience, as residential and SME customers.

> "The website couldn't handle the volume of stuff coming through. The website failed, that's a key thing. At times, the website wasn't accessible at all, and information clearly out of date – on Friday morning, it said expected restoration time Thursday night.
>
> I was checking the website from an interest perspective more than a need and drawing my own conclusions about what that would mean. If we lost power – and I could see that three quarters of Launceston was also out, a major residential outage, I can look at it and self-assess – do I send someone there with a generator?
>
> Also, the website focuses on the distribution network. I found it difficult to work out what was happening on the transmission network. Our generators generate onto the transmission network. Theres generally information, but sometimes, you have to cobble it together. That could be more a – me not looking in the right place, rather than the information not being available."
>
> **Major business**

Multi-site generators struggled getting accurate and consistent restoration times from TasNetworks, though acknowledged the challenging circumstances and changing conditions.

With conditions constantly changing and resources being constantly diverted or reallocated, major businesses understand that it can be difficult to provide accurate information. Additional information, such as outlined in the quote below, could have been beneficial.

> "The hard part was that TasNetworks found it hard to give us meaningful information around

what they were prioritising and what restoration times might be. We needed to know when the power was coming back. The reason it's important for us, it's always an inconvenience, but it's important for us so we can work out where to prioritise resources. If there's an outage, there's no point getting an operator restarted if the line isn't in service.

We want to plan our works to follow them. There's no point sending an operator with a generator to a station that'll be restored in 2 hours. Knowing what they're doing and what expected timeframes, allows us to plan resources effectively.

They had every intention of doing things [communicating], but then something more urgent pops up, and resources get diverted. I don't think they were intentionally not providing information, they weren't intentionally withholding. It was just that they were in a difficult spot where they couldn't provide up to date information. They were busy."

Major business

Large, unmanaged businesses would have benefitted from an escalation point or dedicated contact beyond the residential communications channels.

Two major businesses interviewed were unmanaged, and therefore did not have an account manager within TasNetworks. Both experienced outages lasting several days, impacting their production and operations.

While extremely understanding of the situation TasNetworks was dealing with, a lack of information around restoration time limited their ability to plan in response to the outage. Both could have made alternate arrangements to support business continuity. However, because this information was not available, they were left uncertain as to whether to enact these protocols, and instead left decision-making until the very last viable hours (just in case restoration happened). This situation added substantially to business customers' stress, anxiety and concern throughout the outage.

Tassal case study

The Tassal hatchery at Ranelagh experienced an outage of over 5 days. Power is critical to temperature and tank control/flows for salmon grown at the hatchery. Due to frequent outages and significant consequences if without power for even 20 minutes, the facility is equipped with generators that automatically kick in during an outage. These generators cost Tassal $20,000 per day in diesel and require daily fuel deliveries and staff 24/7 for monitoring.

The hatchery received no communications from TasNetworks and therefore pursued information via residential customer channels (call centre and website), with no success. Even an indication of outage length (e.g. 5-7 days) would have enabled Tassal to enact contingency plans.

An ongoing relationship, or at minimum, a mechanism for escalating critical business issues would have improved the experience for Tassal, and could have turned this from a very frustrating situation, into something that could've been more constructive.

"When I think of other service providers, we usually have a direct contact we can get in touch with and at least get a response. I know it's harder in the middle of the night, but during business hours, even Saturday and Sunday, a direct line, rather than submitting a request through a website means I would've been able to say I've spoken to our TasNetworks rep, they'd say this many outages across the state… it would help having that direct contact."

Inghams case study

The feed making and milling facility at Longford makes feed for half a million chickens in farms across Tasmania. The facility can sustain outages of 1-2 days without power and has no generator access. 2.5 days into the outage, as animal welfare issues became critical with no feed, Inghams contacted TasNetworks via the call centre (after consistently receiving no updates via the website) requesting a restoration time. The call centre team member logged the request, promised to get back to him and did, 4 hours later with an estimated restoration time, that was achieved.

"After 2 days I needed answer. The website was saying check back at the end of the day, every day. I needed more of an answer than that, even if it's an estimate. I can organise contingencies, I just gotta know."

"[TasNetworks] need a business hotline to register your details, the time you can last, and they could work through them. If they know you need power by x date, and they say 'at this stage we think x date'; if say 'our best guess is x', I'm ok with that'. A best guess is better than 'we've got no idea'."

For these businesses, there was (or was perceived to be) no channel for escalating these more critical business issues and their questions around restoration time. They contacted TasNetworks through the residential channels, with mixed success (same pain points experienced as residential and SME customers), and felt frustrated being considered with no greater priority than a residential customer.

A dedicated business phone number, or a proactive email/SMS from TasNetworks with a broad estimated restoration time would have enabled more confident decision making. These estimates could have been exactly that, estimates. Broad or ballpark estimates were considered entirely acceptable as TasNetworks works to triage outages. These customers were aiming to avoid a considerable financial decision to ensure business continuity for several days or a week, only to have power restored an hour later. Receiving a broad indication of a potential restoration window, with the promise that any changes or updates will be communicated, would have supported more confident decision making for these businesses.

In the case of Tassal, a multi-site, large organisation, they saw value in an account manager relationship understanding more about the operations at each site, their resilience to outages for each site, and better information provision through outage events.

"This part of Tasmania we are quite often forgotten about. Need that understanding from them. Hatchery relies on power – to keep millions of fish alive. At Huonville – they can stay cold for 24 hours if keep fridges closed. We still operate and have several teams of people here that need that information to plan. TasNetworks need to know the facilities individually.

Emergency services in Tasmania – they have management contacts, who have our contacts. The fire brigade volunteers have direct contact with myself. We have names and numbers, they've been to site, they've looked at our infrastructure and assets and done risk analysis on that in the event of bushfire. I thought that was pretty good. And TasFire – the senior guys didn't realise what was here… again, we're forgotten about… when they came to site and saw what we do, they were like 'oh wow' they would then prioritise us in the event of a bushfire in the region, given its importance to the valley and the community."

Major business

Some major businesses struggled to source back up power, as TasNetworks had all available units on loan.

There was mixed understanding as to whether generators on loan to TasNetworks were to support healthcare services throughout the storm, or whether they were to mitigate risk caused by industrial action. Regardless, this was unexpected for major businesses and exposed them to further risk if unable to secure back up power.

"While using a generator – we're operating at 30% capacity. We couldn't run refrigeration. I've since reached out to diesel generators Australia, and we've since hired larger generators here for this site. They're here at the site from November to March while we're running at capacity.

In the storm, we were told by DGA that TasNetworks have generators under contract, nothing was available. We made the assumption that they reprioritise those for healthcare."

Major business

Stakeholder experience: Communications and response

Context

Representatives from a range of stakeholder organisations were interviewed as part of the review process. In total, 12 stakeholders were interviewed, representing 7 organisations. Organisations represented included the Ministers Office, the SES, TasFarmers, Anglicare and a range of councils including Waratah-Wynyard, West Tamar and Circular Head.

While most stakeholders had a primary contact at TasNetworks (in the stakeholder management and/or emergency management team) who provided of the majority of information stakeholders sought, information was also sourced and shared through:
- Established emergency management protocols (for local government and SES stakeholders)
- TasALERT website and app

Stakeholders widely wanted to allow TasNetworks to deal with the situation – instead using key touchpoints for confirming response requirements and reporting significant issues or escalating issues or particular vulnerabilities within communities. Widely understanding of what TasNetworks was facing statewide, and wherever possible, wanted to offer support for their efforts rather than provide or cause any interference.

Communications successes

Stakeholders praised the responsiveness and dedication of their key contact within TasNetworks.

The dedication of these team members was never questioned, and stakeholders spoke highly of the responsiveness of TasNetworks staff under considerable pressure. It was recognized widely that these team members worked tirelessly to keep stakeholders as informed as possible, throughout the outage and recovery process.

Where information was not immediately known, they worked hard to find the information and share it with stakeholders throughout the storm and recovery process.

While these key points of contact were critical, the SES identified a potential risk in a lack of backup personnel, and while their key contact at TasNetworks was exceptional, consideration should be given to effective contingency planning and ensuring relief for these highly dedicated employees working around the clock.

> "The liaison we had was good. Having one person to go to in terms of local government was helpful. More information would've been helpful, but she was quick to react, would find the information we were asking for and it was useful to have one contact person.
>
> **Stakeholder**
>
> "Interactions were positive. There was nothing we asked for that wasn't delivered in a timely manner. We worked well together. We also didn't want them servicing us, we wanted them to have the space to fix the problem."
>
> **Stakeholder**
>
> "We had meetings and he was at all of them. He was always available. If you have a critical issue, he wants to know about. He was very responsive and was our contact day and night. I don't know who I would've contacted if he wasn't there. While that's awesome, in that he

was the single point of contact, he could also be the single point of failure if something may have happened."

Stakeholder

TasNetworks' engagement with established regional emergency management groups was effective.

Several coordinated emergency management groups exist across Tasmania, and while they have a regular cadence of meetings, their response is activated in emergency events. It is a coordinated response with clear trigger points and response actions.

TasNetworks largely communicated well via these groups in providing information to critical stakeholders, which included members of the SES, local government representatives and other essential services (Police, Fire etc). Ensuring information flows through this group, rather than TasNetworks looking to create or establish another structure, is important for future major storm or outage events.

In this event however, it took some time for the emergency response to be activated (trigger point was not reached or was unclear in this type of storm event), and there was confusion and a lack of clear protocols around what response from the emergency management groups was required. This is discussed further in the learnings section.

"Emergency management protocols work really well. Each region had its own response, led by police and SES, that was operating. They coordinate everything. I wouldn't have expected [TasNetworks] to lead the whole response, there's something else that does that... it's about them feeding information in through that pre-existing facility, and decisions taken at that facility. TasNetworks doesn't need any separate command and control, there's a good regional emergency management coordination already."

Stakeholder

"This event was different. In a major event, they stand up emergency management protocols, then it's the SES, the premier - there's a hierarchy.

Eventually we had a regional ops centre stood up, but it wasn't a typical event. Typically, we're stood up, and then told what to do, TasFire might take control, SES might take control, depending on the incident. We're then instructed what to do, whether it's evacuation centres etc. That's where this was different. It didn't fit the normal emergency management process. It was us pushing hard to get it classified as a natural disaster. It's not your typical event. Flooding is a typical event, but that's not what happened here. It was a natural disaster, people described it like a cyclone.

We didn't have clarity of information. We planned for extended delays, but no one knows what that is. It wasn't until a week after, that northern emergency management was pulled together, and we got a briefing of what that meant."

Stakeholder

Communications learnings

A lack of information provided about the estimated length of the outage (or potential restoration time) impacted the ability to plan for the duration of the outage.

The primary learning was that a lack of visibility over restoration times created ambiguity around how to plan to support communities. Most had no idea how long their community would be without power, and this lack of even an estimated or ballpark timeframe (e.g. 'it's likely to be a few days', or, 'we are looking like at least a week') meant they couldn't confidently enact contingency plans. Setting expectations for restoration times (again, even broad) as soon as possible, is critical.

Without any indication of which suburbs/towns were likely to experience longer outages, it made the deployment of relief efforts much more challenging as there was a preference to direct additional support where the need would be greatest (where outages would last longest).

Councils were provided with information on which suburbs have the highest number of outages, however had no visibility of which communities would experience the longest outages as this forward forecasting information was not available.

"If you can't get there for 3 days, tell us straight away. It's acceptable to say were still working it out – its ok to say we won't get there in 3 days. People value honesty. People want information, and they want it in a timely manner, and updated in as close to real time as possible – some will understand it's not always possible. Don't pretend to be there tomorrow if you won't."

Stakeholder

"The frustration early on was not understanding restoration times. We were only hearing 'this is how many are out'. No one expected it to be out for 3+ days. We were trying to find out where to put resources and for how long. There was also community pushback, people were saying 'why aren't you telling us how long it's going to be out?'. We were 7 days in when TasNetworks told us. If we knew it was going to be 10 days, we could've stood up a lot more support. We were trying to resource things. Once we got more power – we could use facilities that were open anyway. That would've been nice to know."

Stakeholder

"Key thing we needed to know was the length of time an area was going to be out of service for. That was still the case until the Tuesday/Wednesday. We didn't know what communities were going to be exposed to extended outages.

We had councils trying to be active in supporting communities, but 4-5 that were offline, without power, wanting to prioritise the levels of service. The information was not available on the website and even when we asked, that information was slow coming. They didn't know themselves. [TasNetworks] could've been more proactive around restoration times communications, even if they don't have the answer."

Stakeholder

"Don't know whether it was political nervousness, but TasNetworks need to be mindful that it's best to be upfront, because [community] are forgiving when you are. It's better to say 'it's going to be out for 2 weeks' and allow people to plan."

Stakeholder

Information from TasNetworks' stakeholder team didn't always align with the website information and more alignment was needed in terms of what TasNetworks was or wasn't doing in terms of recovery centres.

Local government stakeholders referenced an ambiguous message on the TasNetworks website, suggesting that relief centres were being coordinated through councils. The lack of clarity around the expectation of councils led to much confusion. Further clarity was sought from TasNetworks, and while initially vague (plans were perceived as being developed 'on the fly') a small amount of further direction was provided.

Clearer expectations with trigger points would improve clarity around this in future. Without this clarity, it remains ambiguous, ill-defined and may lead to public perception issues if some councils increase service levels and others don't.

Similarly, there are well defined emergency protocols that exist, however when TasNetworks publicly communicated about relief being available, this event hadn't yet been declared an event where such support would have been triggered. As a result, individual councils were required to make this decision on their own, and there was pressure to achieve some level of consistency with neighbouring councils.

Without clearer guidance, there was pressure for local governments to establish some form of support, with limited understanding of where to implement support, and uncertainty as to who would be funding and resourcing these centres. Some provided feedback that TasNetworks anticipated a need for tea and coffee provisions, whereas evacuation centres typically require food and bedding for people who are traumatised and potentially displaced.

On reflection, many stakeholders questioned the need for recovery centres, based on low usage rates and strong community-based support systems. There is a need for a clearly defined trigger point for 'standing up' recovery centres in future storm events such as this, with expectations and responsibilities clear.

"Information on the website wasn't congruent with what [TasNetworks] was saying. The website said TasNetworks would provide for customers who had to evacuate. [TasNetworks] asked whether we needed tea and coffee which was not needed and not appropriate. At the time, if people needed to come to an evacuation centre, they need food, bedding. We have access to most of those things, but it seemed TasNetworks was unprepared, or didn't understand what an evacuation centre looked like and therefore what they might do for their customers. As it was, people came, but didn't stay."

Stakeholder

"It seemed like TasNetworks may not have practiced its emergency protocols, and were thinking through as they went. They didn't get anything wrong, they were just slow. If it's thought through in advance, you react faster. It felt like they hadn't thought through the implications of evac centres and their responsibilities."

Stakeholder

"At the time it wasn't a declared an event to be used as an evacuation centre. There was confusion as to whether we were opening a facility for TasNetworks to man, and other councils sought financial contributions from TasNetworks, for providing this aid.

There was uncertainty about what level of facility we were expected to maintain and was the compensation there? There was a call for assistance, to be able to open facilities for provision

of hot coffees, phone chargers etc but there wasn't clarity in terms of managing those facilities. Most of those things under emergency management are covered under MOU, through facilitated groups. In this instance it wasn't, it was vague. It wasn't yet declared as an event that would activate emergency protocols."

Stakeholder

"It would be good for them to set up something to instigate the requirement for our engagement. It was very ad hoc – 'can you please set up something', but no clarity of what. Even if there's a standing MOU, to provide some clarity on, should we become needed again, what does that look like, so we don't end up in the same space."

Stakeholder

Stakeholders greatly appreciated the information received from TasNetworks, and suggested ways to make it more immediately actionable.

In just one example, a community support organisation with over 1,000 clients who are aged or living with disability, was contacting clients impacted by outages. To discern which customers to contact, they had to manually type each address into TasNetworks website to check whether each client was impacted by an outage. This process was initially completed daily, taking many hours. In future, being able to track customer power status by uploading a spreadsheet with a unique identifier or NMI may expedite this process, reduce the administrative requirement on this organisation, and enable them to contact and offer support to impacted clients faster.

Similarly, the reports TasNetworks provide the SES emergency management coordination team were excellent and extremely appreciated. This information, however, is then forwarded to local government authorities within each region. In addition to the suburb-by-suburb spreadsheet (outlining the number of impacted properties), a column or filter for municipality would have expedited the information sharing from the SES to each council.

Importantly, these stakeholders were able to work within the information provided to relay information to councils and clients, however, are system improvements that could be considered by TasNetworks.

"The spreadsheet consisted of power outages across each region and location. It was a town-based approach. It was handy, but what we had to do was find out what municipality it was in, to breakdown and provide to councils. From memory, the spreadsheet provided an understanding of how long towns were out of power. Councils could look at the longest outage period and tailor response towards those areas. But it didn't have restoration time, so we didn't know if they were due for restoration soon. Councils looked at the spreadsheet to see who was without power for a long time and took food relief to the community. That was really helpful."

Stakeholder

Increased collaboration and information could facilitate faster recovery for councils.

Local government stakeholders deployed their own field crews to support TasNetworks and the SES with the cleanup of fallen trees and debris. While appreciative of the need to ensure the safety of all staff and community members, councils would have liked to send field crews to conduct tidy-up work after TasNetworks crews had assessed each area/incident for safety. Stakeholders from the SES also raised this as a point of feedback, suggesting that there are benefits to agencies working collaboratively in times such as this. A lack of access to information about where works crews were made these efforts more difficult. Councils were open to more collaborative efforts, like this, to support TasNetworks expedite power restoration to communities.

Considering whether more information can be shared with Councils that supports informed decision-making and collaborative efforts, could be explored.

> "A portal to be shared with the emergency management group that shows how TasNetworks is prioritising works would be helpful. It could have what the intended program is and plans for redistribution. There's not really any avenue for us to be able to get that information. It would help us schedule our own work (tree clearing). We were alerted once TasNetworks had completed jobs, but it would've been good to have a lead in to program and plan rather than be reactive."
>
> **Stakeholder**
>
> "The City of Launceston were willing to clear trees, cut trees, to speed the process up, but there was pushback from TasNetworks. If they make the area safe, they should take on board, all in this together. If other agencies can assist, it will make life easier."
>
> **Stakeholder**

An absence of up-to-date information from TasNetworks prompted customers to contact other organisations for information instead.

Stakeholders understand TasNetworks were absolutely stretched throughout the storm and outage event – from a field crew and communications perspective. An inadvertent consequence however, of TasNetworks' lack of available information, prompted customers to reach out to their local governments, TasFarmers and the Minister's Office, looking for more information.

Stakeholder preferences are unanimously to amplify content distributed by TasNetworks rather than create their own content. The lack of information available from TasNetworks meant there was limited content for local government and other stakeholders to share with these customers. More communications throughout the storm, outage and recovery process would have minimised this.

> "It was an OK response… I hesitate to say it was a good response. Crews and contractors worked hard, at all hours – no complaints there. It was the delay in communications at the beginning that was the problem. TasNetworks could've done a bit more in the early stages to communicate that the outages are statewide and 'we're on it'. It happened eventually, but it could've happened faster."
>
> **Stakeholder**

"Community always wants communication and real time information as far as possible. If directed to a map, they want information – even if it's 'we know it's out, it's out everywhere, realistically we won't get to it for a couple of days'. Facebook rumours fly if there's an information gap."

"If the website is updated at 4pm and again at 8pm and there's no change, at least they know someone's looking at it, it's not been abandoned since midday. It's a small thing, but people came to us for information because they missed it from TasNetworks."

"The day-to-day communications capacity needs to be bolstered, or it would be good for them to have backup people to call in for situations like this. The whole communications team need a bolster up."

Stakeholder

Consider strategies for updating communities impacted by telecommunications outages.

With many communities impacted by loss of telecommunications services, Stakeholders suggested back up methods for relaying information to community members. From previous stakeholder experiences, back up satellite communications (satellite phones or Starlink), coupled with handwritten whiteboard updates could provide communities impacted by telecommunications outages with relevant information at recovery or evacuation centres.

Expectations for TasNetworks role in future major storm events

Priorities and expectations of TasNetworks during major outage events

All customers and stakeholders agreed that TasNetworks' primary responsibility throughout major outage events is to restore power as quickly as possible while maintaining the safety of employees, community and the network.

Of similar, though secondary importance is TasNetworks' responsibility to keep customers and stakeholders informed throughout the restoration process. This includes communicating TasNetworks awareness of the outage and providing sufficient and timely information for customers to plan for the duration of the outage. As discussed in earlier sections of this report, while restoration times may still be unknown (customers and stakeholders are understanding of this), estimated timeframes should be provided as soon as possible, and updates provided to customers and stakeholders as more information becomes available and/or periodically throughout the outage.

There was a strong desire for TasNetworks to 'stick to your strengths' and that expanding its remit during major events may pull resources away from the core and primary responsibility of safely restoring power in a timely manner.

> "The first thing is safety. Keep everything safe. Through design work – if faults, open breakers so energy doesn't flow into - people, property, livestock, staff. Keep staff safe. Also, communicate that to us – help us understand what they are working to and what their priorities are, understand where we sit in the priority set. Their role in the aftermath is to restore power and restore it quickly."
>
> **Major business**

Customer expectations for TasNetworks providing support services

Community centres are very well regarded in natural disaster / crisis situations like this – they are an important place for people to go and not only keep warm and charge devices, but to gather information and updates, and seek community – it's important for them to know and be reassured that they are not alone and having to cope with this, that it is a shared experience and they aren't alone.

Customers highlighted a range of local government, community organisation and local business-led initiatives in affected communities that provided people with interim access to power, food, and showers if needed throughout the outage. This was mostly recalled in regional or rural communities and less commonly recalled or required for major cities.

Examples included:
- In Stanley, a local café allowed community members to charge their phones and the caravan park opened its doors to the local community for free hot showers.
- In Zeehan, the local RSL cooked meals for residents impacted by extended power outages and delivered them to their homes, and the local Study Hub allowed members of the community to come in and charge their devices
- In Scottsdale, the local council provided shelter, showers, company and charging facilities at a local sports club.

Very few saw a role for TasNetworks in providing or coordinating additional support services to the community throughout major storms or outage events. They unanimously agreed that TasNetworks' priority should be the safe restoration of power and timely communications.

Likewise, no customer recalled TasNetworks providing any additional community-based assistance beyond generators for some dairy farms.

Perception implications should also be considered if TasNetworks were to coordinate in-community support services (beyond power restoration and communications) in future. Customers and stakeholders would widely prefer TasNetworks to be deploying all available resources to the recovery and communications efforts, and in some regions where on the ground crews have reduced or depots closed, these efforts may be perceived as tokenistic and further create distance (and disillusionment) with TasNetworks. Any TasNetworks resources providing these additional support services may also be perceived as one less person helping to restore power to impacted communities. Communicating what is available through other organisations was the only role for TasNetworks in this space.

The exception to this is any support services provided in the way of backup power supply to vulnerable or critical customers. For residential customers this is considered relevant for hospitals, aged care facilities and life support or other vulnerable customers, and for businesses this is where animal welfare issues may be at risk. Providing backup generators in these more critical cases was considered within TasNetworks remit and duty of care.

> "We need better communications and notifications [from TasNetworks] so we can band together. Not coffee and biscuits."
>
> **Residential customer – Zeehan**
>
> "Some were concerned that residents would wonder why TasNetworks staff were helping people with showers and charging their mobile phones and not repairing infrastructure to get the power back on."
>
> **Residential customer – Scottsdale**
>
> "They're poles and wires. It would be wrong to expect TasNetworks to expect to play a role beyond this. They go above and beyond their role and charter anyway. Their fundamental job is safety of the network to make sure it doesn't harm the public."
>
> **Major business**
>
> "That's not their job. I want them to be focussing their efforts on getting power back on. Role of others to be providing that – councils, government, private, public. In these emergency scenarios, they should be focussing on their core business, which is to restore power as quickly as possible. All those things add time to restoration and time to their business. As a result, people are without power for longer and it costs them more. They should be focussed on bringing power back on."
>
> **Major business**

Similarly, while some Councils and local businesses established additional services support for communities, there was little use of these options among customers involved in the consultation. Stakeholders also observed a lower than anticipated uptake of these options.

Stakeholders and major business' perceptions largely aligned with that of residential and business customers, that TasNetworks should stick to its primary remit of safely restoring power to Tasmanians.

Interviews with Stakeholders revealed an ambiguous message provided on TasNetworks website early in the storm and outage period, suggesting that some form of relief centres were being coordinated through local councils.

This prompted many questions, which were raised by stakeholders representing Local Government Authorities, including – what kind of relief? Where? For how long? Little detail was provided initially, and though stakeholders credited TasNetworks team as being responsive and highly mindful of the impact of outages on the community, to stakeholders it appeared as though the details were being worked out as they went.

The lack of clarity around expectations of Councils led to a piecemeal approach, and also some sense that if neighbouring councils were increasing service levels of community, others must do the same (public perception considerations). This is covered in more detail in the stakeholder section of this report

Expectations for TasNetworks media presence

Awareness and consumption of media through the outage event

Few customers recalled media coverage of the storm and outages, and most rarely read or watched the news. The exception to this is local news or radio, which was felt to be more local and therefore relevant as a source of information for residential and business customers, and stakeholders. Many actively tuned in to local radio throughout the outage (via battery operated radio or in the car).

Media coverage was typically statewide, when local was most relevant

Criticisms of the media coverage were that it tended to be statewide, reporting overall numbers and prioritising updates about major centres, rather than answering the critical question customers and stakeholders have (individual restoration times). Mass media was felt to lack the localised perspective and nuance desired, and instead serves more of a public relations function for TasNetworks.

Any engagement with the media (although low overall), disappeared almost completely following power restoration, with customers rarely proactively following news or media coverage of the outages once their power had been restored.

Visibility of TasNetworks in the media

Due to this low engagement with the media generally, it is perhaps not surprising that customer recall of TasNetworks presence in the media was also low. Very few customers recalled seeing TasNetworks represented in news media during or after the event, beyond some earlier messaging about the industrial action.

The exception to this was stakeholders, and a small number of highly invested/interested customers who desired accountability from TasNetworks including in the media, usually prompted by frustrations over the industrial action occurring at the same time. They felt TasNetworks should be accountable to the public and should be using the media to inform the community about how restoration is progressing, and when regions/suburbs are expected to have power restored. There was feedback that TasNetworks was active in the media when discussing the industrial issues the week before, however perceived as somewhat absent, or represented by other members of the TasNetworks leadership team throughout the storm, outage and restoration process.

"I'm not aware of any press conferences. Maybe one would've been helpful. I didn't hear any complaints that they weren't visible. This also wouldn't give people the local knowledge. People want to know about the local impacts."

Stakeholder

"I think part of it is identifying those that people will listen to. The Premier was out there during COVID-19, because the media will turn up. If it's a natural disaster, someone like the Premier needing to have press conferences is the way to guarantee information getting out. TasNetworks needs to do its bit in letting people know when power issues will be sorted, but it goes to the DPAC question around their portfolio responsibility for emergency management."

Stakeholder

"[NAME] fronted the media, all they can say is they're doing their best. In Tasmania in COVID, everyday there was the Premier or his representative, gave an update in the media. I wonder, all of a sudden news is important to people, if it happened again, do they have a defined communication so that every day they are on the news at the same time. If it was the 6pm news, a TasNetworks person give an update on where they're at. One update a day that gets repeated, radio repeats it – they could repeat it every hour. Also focus on locations, so 'in the north of Tas, x people disconnected, 3-5 days, bear with us, this is where focussing'.

The government is the lead. The Premier. They have the commissioner of police – they're the ones that head up the emergency communications. TasNetworks feeds into that."

Stakeholder

"Sometimes the expertise doesn't sit with TasNetworks. I would expect there'll be like a state controller from an emergency perspective, that would probably play a key role in communications. Where you've got issues around roads, or trees down, or whatever is going on, its broader than power supply – it's a state emergency – those storm impacts are far greater than just power. I'd expect more that it would be a state emergency controller or a government agency leading that conversation. If I think about a bushfire vs a storm – they'd generally have an emergency controller doing the bulk of the communications. It shouldn't necessarily be TasNetworks leading it, but they would feed information into the process."
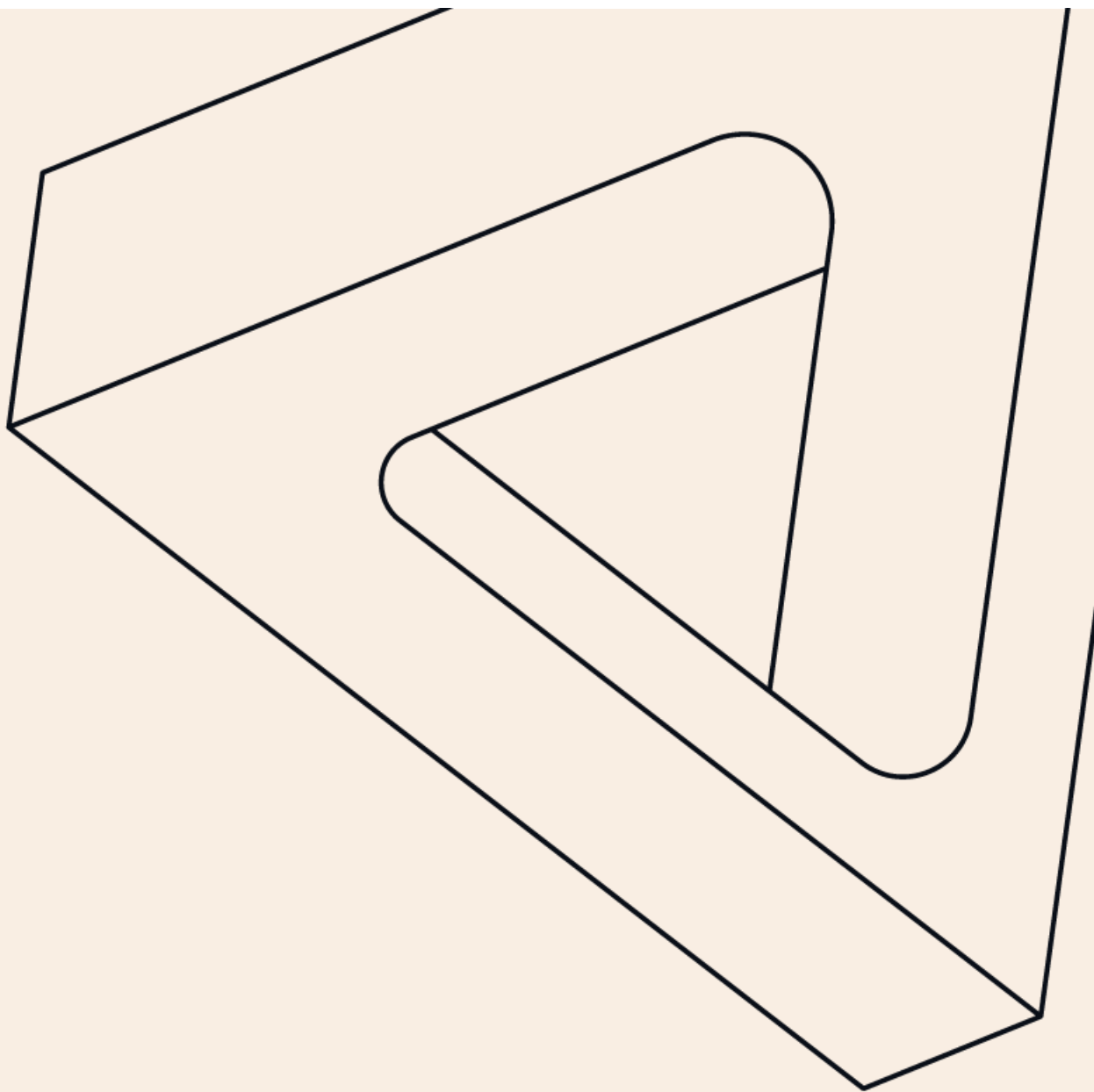
Stakeholder

"There is a defined emergency response structure. It's situational and depends on the levels. For a statewide declared emergency, it would never feel appropriate for TasNetworks to be the lead agency. If small scale, locally, sure. But once you get into the scenarios where it is impacting more than TasNetworks, and it's interagency – fires are a good example, in that sense, no."

Major business

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