



VANUATU 2G AND 3G MOBILE NETWORKS CLOSURE PLAN

5 November 2025

Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Background	2
3. Potential adverse impacts of 2G and 3G network closures	3
4. The National Plan	4

1. Introduction

The telecommunications industry and the technology sector more broadly are evolving rapidly driven by the evolution of new and improved technologies and the continuing demand for services and applications, many of which are data intensive.

At present the mobile networks in Vanuatu reflect various generations of technology, and specifically 2G (GSM and CDMA); 3G (UMTS) and 4G (LTE). To date no operator has deployed 5G in its network, although various plans to do so have been publicized in recent years.

Over the past decade and more the licensed operators and regulators in many countries around the world have pursued various approaches to the closure of 2G and 3G networks for reasons set out later in this paper. The purpose of this plan is to set a timetable for closure of 2G and 3G networks in Vanuatu, so that all stakeholders and the TRBR can have a common basis for expectations and on which to plan.

In the development of this plan, TRBR has considered the interests of mobile network operators and service providers that have been communicated to TRBR. TRBR has adopted as guiding principles the long-term interests of users of communications services and the sustainability of solutions for the sector as a whole.

2. Background

2G networks are designed to process voice and message traffic at relatively low speeds. Their data capabilities are effectively non-existent. 3G networks are capable of providing internet access at relatively low speeds. However, they are constrained in the data rates they can achieve, and are inefficient relative to the data intensity of many popular applications that need to be accessed via the internet, and relative to the capabilities of networks employing later generation technologies such as 4G and 5G.

Vanuatu aims to have a fully operating digital economy and an inclusive online society. This is necessary if Vanuatu is to become and remain part of the global economy that has developed during the 21st century so far. Global digital connectivity will become even more important for the welfare of national economies and social inclusion in the foreseeable future.

The imperative is therefore to encourage all end users of communications services in Vanuatu to use devices and services that are compatible with broadband connectivity and high speed internet access, and to move away from voice-centric services and devices that are legacies of the past.

It is imperative to have both a national plan and aligned operator plans to achieve this outcome. Global and local experience suggests that the organic pace of user adoption of 4G services, without more, will be inordinately slow for various reasons, such as:

- User inertia, being satisfied with the devices and services they have – a characteristic that often reflects in older age cohorts;
- Network availability constraints, particularly in rural areas where the commercial incentive for operators to invest or to upgrade services is weak; and
- Affordability issues, especially in areas or communities with low incomes, including rural areas.

With the increase in mobile service take-up, the level of internet access via mobile devices is increasing, and higher band spectrum is being sought by operators. Spectrum is a scarce resource and greater attention is being given to overall spectral efficiency. 2G and 3G networks are materially less efficient in their use of spectrum than 4G and 5G networks. Further research and innovation are being applied in this area, but it is to 5G and, in future, 6G, network technologies, not to 2G and 3G, that increases in spectral efficiency will result. 2G and 3G networks will become increasingly inefficient in the use of spectrum, relative to more recent technologies. 2G and 3G spectrum will therefore be better redeployed for other higher value uses in many circumstances.

The geography of Vanuatu means that the general approach, described in the previous paragraph, needs to be modified. The availability of voice services must remain the highest priority for mobile coverage in remote islands. Operators must ensure continuous availability of voice service throughout any closure process, and especially in the case of remoter communities who have even greater dependence than others on voice service.

3. Potential adverse impacts of 2G and 3G network closures

Experience of 2G and 3G closures in other countries suggests a number of potential adverse impacts, mostly associated with the transition period when closure is occurring and the immediate post-closure period. Experience also shows that these potential adverse impacts can be largely avoided with detailed and thorough planning.

The key potential adverse impacts, and actions in mitigation, are:

1. Subscribers with older devices that can only access 2G or 3G network services may be left without any service once the relevant networks are closed.

The risk can be reduced by adequate notice to subscribers, with early and repeated notices in public media and via direct messaging of relevant subscribers.

2. Subscribers with older devices may not be able to contact emergency services, creating increased risks to the subscribers and their families if they have a medical, fire or police emergency.

This risk can be reduced by the notification program referred to in relation to the first point.

3. Subscribers may not be able to afford to upgrade to a smartphone or other 4G device.

This risk can be reduced by operators facilitating access to a range of lower cost 4G-compatible devices. In other jurisdictions such offers have been built into competitive sales programs by operators and their agents.

4. Mobile operators may be commercially stressed by a rapid transition period.

Within broad time constraints, this plan has been developed to encourage early planning by mobile operators enabling them to implement closures in a manner and at a pace that they can manage. The detailed operator plans for closure can be national or provincial, but they will be the individual plan of each mobile operator. Operators need not have the same closure timetables as each other.

5. Device importers and retailers might continue to import and sell devices that are about to become obsolete or unusable, to the detriment of consumer welfare.

4. The National Plan

The National Plan for the closure of 2G and 3G mobile networks is a timetable framework within licensed mobile network operators can plan for the closure of their individual networks. Subject to consistency with the National Plan, operator plans can take into account individual commercial and other considerations, and need not be the same as, or similar to, each other.

The elements in the National Plan are:

1. All 3G mobile networks in Vanuatu shall close by **31 December 2030**.
2. All 2G mobile networks in Vanuatu shall close by **31 December 2033**.
3. All licensed mobile network operators shall submit to TRBR their initial plans for 2G and 3G closure consistent with points 1 and 2 by **31 December 2027**.

4. Mobile network operator plans shall contain, the following information in relation to both 2G and 3G networks:
 - a. Details of 2G and 3G network sites that will be operating at the end of each six-month period, commencing from 1 July 2026, together with maps showing the areas and communities being served by such sites in each six-month period;
 - b. For the initial two periods of six-months, the dates on which it is planned to withdraw 2G and 3G services in the areas affected;
 - c. Details of the media information campaign and the individual subscriber notification arrangements that the network operator intends to implement in each area affected by a closure including the dates for implementation of these arrangements;
 - d. Details of the Help Lines and other customer information services that will be available to subscribers in affected areas during the period leading up to and after the closure, commencing no later than six months before the planned closure;
 - e. Details of the specific assistance that will be made available, if any, to customers who require assistance, including special payment terms, to upgrade handsets; and
 - f. Arrangements for e-waste management in relation to the collection and disposal of 2G and 3G handsets and other customer devices.
5. Some content in operator closure plans may be commercially confidential. It is for each individual operator to determine what information it considers to be commercially confidential, and to submit complete and redacted versions of their plans to TRBR for approval. Only the approved redacted versions of plans need to be published by operators on their websites. In approving redacted plans TRBR will take into account whether the plan provides sufficient detail on impending network closures to enable end-users to make informed choices in good time.
6. Operator closure plans will be subject to approval by TRBR based on (a) consistency with the National Plan and plan timetables; (b) adequacy of plan coverage; and (c) timetable and date specificity.
7. TRBR may require amendment of operator plans to meet the criteria in point 5 above.
8. TRBR will exercise its powers to prohibit the import and sale of handsets that can only work with 2G and 3G networks, one year before the closure deadlines set out in points 1 and 2 above.
9. TRBR will review the National Plan at least annually and make such amendments as are deemed appropriate to adjust to changed circumstances.

10. Mobile network operators may amend their individual closure plans at any time, subject to the National Plan, and must review and, if appropriate, amend, their individual closure plans within three months of any amendment to the National Plan, as may be required by TRBR.