

# Submission to Australia's telecommunications numbering plan

## **Summary and Recommendation**

Scams and unwanted solicitation calls are being facilitated by an apparent ability for overseas (and domestic?) parties to freely and anonymously use or show calls as originating from Australian phone numbers (both landline and mobile numbers). This is causing a corrosive effect on general community trust of both other people and in the phone system as well as the more direct cost of the scams.

As is well reported, text scams are a major menace and the ubiquitous "Aus Post" or "Linkt" message asking you to "refresh your details" is a scourge that should not be allowed to continue.

My recommendation is that non traceable use of Australian phone numbers (for both calls and texts) be banned and that any call/text originating internationally be required to have an international phone number. Further, only traceable Australian companies should be allowed to send out texts with their names replacing their phone number. A general advertising campaign should follow implementation of this to raise awareness of it. This should go a long way to restoring the Australian community's trust of each other and of a vital component of our life.

## **Discussion**

A phone is a vital communication tool in this modern world. It enables us to quickly reach friends, family, work colleagues, suppliers and customers. Although caller ID enables identification of calls from friends and family other contacts are frequently less obvious (companies we may be buying something from, work colleagues we don't usually contact etc). Until a decade ago or so I felt confident that an unknown caller on my phone was still someone I was likely happy to speak with. Now it is most likely (I'd say 90%) that a call from an Australian number not in my address book is a scam caller.

I have a fear that answering a call may put me in peril and that doing so will add my number to some hidden list of numbers that answers calls which then just causes more unwanted calls. I am not the only person I know with this fear and I suspect it is becoming pervasive in the Australian community.

This fear is corrosive to the great sense of community that Australia has – that we are a land of welcoming people. Our nation is known and thought of fondly internationally for this spirit. We should endeavour to protect and nurture it.

When I ask police what can be done to trace and block such calls (and bring the callers to justice) I am told that they are untraceable.

How is it possible that callers with Australian phone numbers are untraceable? When I purchase a mobile phone/land line number I am required to provide 100 points of ID. This makes me traceable. Why are others not required to do likewise?

My understanding is that it is possible for international callers to generate a call with an Australian phone number using some sort of gate way into the Australian telecoms system. I have a "Skype Out" account and I understand that it uses such technology and that makes it very cheap to make international calls in this way.

Although I am certainly in favour of lowering the cost of all things it should not be at the expense of allowing/facilitating criminal and antisocial behaviour.

If a call comes from an Australian phone number it should be traceable. The only "private number" calls should be from people at risk and the actual phone number should be retained by the telecommunications company so that police can trace it if required. The knowledge that a call is traceable will restore the community's trust in the telecommunications system and will enable police to quickly move to root out any bad actors.

Although it may not be possible to ban incoming international scam calls, the knowledge that a call is from an overseas party would be a welcome warning. If a call comes in from overseas it should retain an international phone number. If this is not possible using the type of gateway technology used by SkypeOut that facility should be removed. I would gladly pay extra for the modest number of calls I make with it.

The obvious "solution" to scam calls is to let any call from a number you don't know to "go through to voice mail". Yes that is a solution – but what if you're waiting on a call back from someone, a supplier of something you're trying to order – let it go through to voice mail and you might have to get back onto a long "wait queue". I've had this happen to me – and yes I answered two scam calls before the actual caller I was waiting for called.

Further, only traceable Australian companies should be allowed to send out texts with their names replacing their phone number. As is well reported, text scams are a major menace and the ubiquitous "Aus Post" or "Linkt" message asking you to "refresh your details" is a scourge that should not be allowed.

Further, only traceable Australian phone numbers should be allowed to send out texts with an Australian number. I understand that the ability to send out texts by emergency services is an important and welcome capability but it should be possible for the number that generates the text to be traceable. That way, again, scams should be able to be quickly shut down and those responsible brought to justice.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Keith Edwards