

MEDIA RELEASE (for immediate release)

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Burying electricity lines to avoid extreme weather only creates new resilience risk without recognising excavation damage threat

Before You Dig Australia (BYDA) is urging the energy regulator to update its Network Resilience Guidelines to recognise the risk posed by costly excavation damage to utility infrastructure.

In a submission to the Australian Energy Regulator's consultation on the draft guidelines, BYDA says network resilience is inseparable from the protection of underground utility assets from third party excavation damage.

"The common goal here is **reducing the risk and impact on consumers** of interruptions to essential services," BYDA CEO Mell Greenall said.

"The regulator identifies the option of 'undergrounding' - or burying - electricity infrastructure as a resilience measure that improves reliability and safety.

"However, every kilometre of network infrastructure placed underground to withstand storms and bushfires becomes exposed to a different, persistent and costly threat: damage from excavation and other ground-disturbing works.

"A network insulated from weather but struck by an excavator **has not delivered the consumer or community outcome** any resilience expenditure was approved to secure."

Critical infrastructure interdependency

Based on available data, electricity outages account for at least 12 per cent of the more than 15,000 reported underground utility strikes that cost the economy almost \$5 billion each year.

These statistics soar when telecommunication assets – as an interdependent infrastructure class – are included, with the true collective utility strikes numbers likely three times higher.

BYDA's submission to the AER makes several recommendations addressing the definition of network resilience, the evidence base for investment, data standards and reporting, community resilience and critical infrastructure interdependency.

"After extreme weather events, clean-up and reconstruction efforts generate surges in ground-disturbing activity, frequently undertaken at pace in areas where surface markers have been destroyed," Ms Greenall said.

“This includes excavation work for reinstating above ground or overhead utilities, including electricity and telco assets.

“Third-party damage during recovery directly extends outage duration and undermines the restoration outcomes the AER's framework is designed to protect.

“Essentially, excavation risk peaks precisely when network and community resilience matter most.”

Download BYDA’s submission [here](#) or visit:

<https://www.byda.com.au/about/advocacy/evidence-and-impact/>

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About Before You Dig Australia

BYDA is a not-for-profit, industry-led organisation that operates Australia’s national “before you dig” referral service. Each year we facilitate more than 2.7 million requests for underground utility information from contractors, engineers, councils and the public.

Our role is to connect those planning excavation with the asset owners responsible for critical infrastructure to prevent damage, disruption and injury. Read our latest research report [here](#).