Service Standards

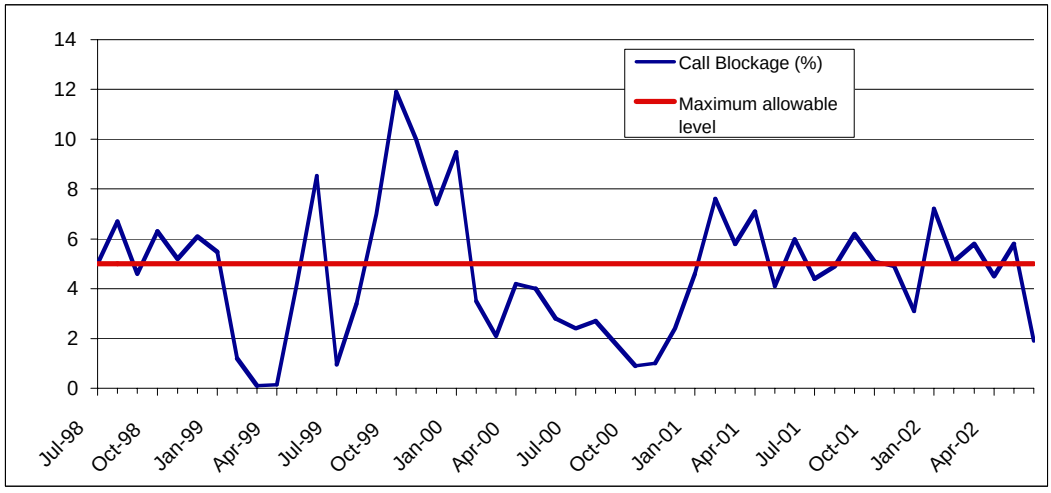
This section determines the extent to which the National Relay Service (NRS) provider has complied with its contract to provide the NRS. This assessment has been undertaken on the basis of the most recently available data—that is, to June 2002. The information in this section is based on annual, quarterly and monthly NRS Performance Reports compiled by Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) and the Australian Communications Authority (ACA).

In delivering the NRS Plan, the NRS provider must adhere to the following five Service Standards:

i. **No more than five calls per 100 into NRS will receive a busy signal, based on a quarterly average. This is known as 'call blockage'.**

Meeting call blockage standards has been a problem across the contract period. ACE has only partially complied with this Service Standard in each of the four contract years to date. In each of these years, ACE incurred a penalty for quarters in which call blockage was higher than the 5 per cent target. Of the 16 quarters reported on, six had an average call blockage rate higher than 5 per cent. Three of these six quarters were December quarters, indicating ACE has particular difficulties managing demand leading up to and during the holiday period. ACE's performance on this standard since January 2001 has been less variable than the period prior to January 2001.

Figure 1.1 Call Blockage (per cent)



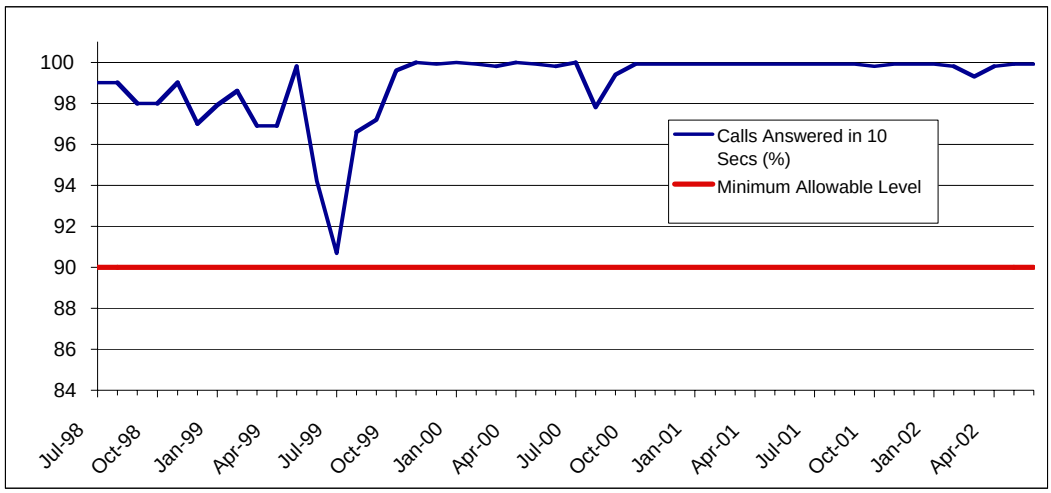
Source: ACA

ii. **At least 90 per cent of calls will be answered by the NRS within 10 seconds, based on a quarterly average.**

ACE has consistently complied with this Service Standard, with close to 100 per cent of calls answered within the 10 second standard. This level of achievement is predominantly due to the use of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, which

automatically picks up incoming calls and determines their type (voice, modem, TTY etc), before, routing the call to an available operator.

Figure 1.2 Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds (per cent)

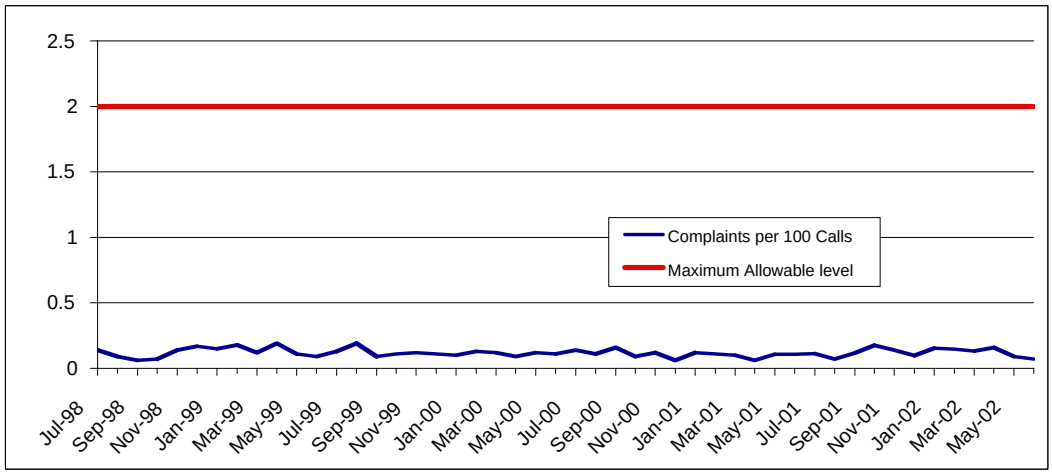


Source: ACA

iii. **The level of complaints received by ACE, the Australian Government or Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, will be less than two per cent of the total successful calls through the NRS, based on quarterly average.**

ACE has consistently complied with this Service Standard across the contract period, having a very low rate of complaints, with an average of approximately 0.2 complaints per 100 successful calls, well within the Service Standard level of 2 complaints per 100 calls.

Figure 1.3 Complaints Received (percentage of total calls)

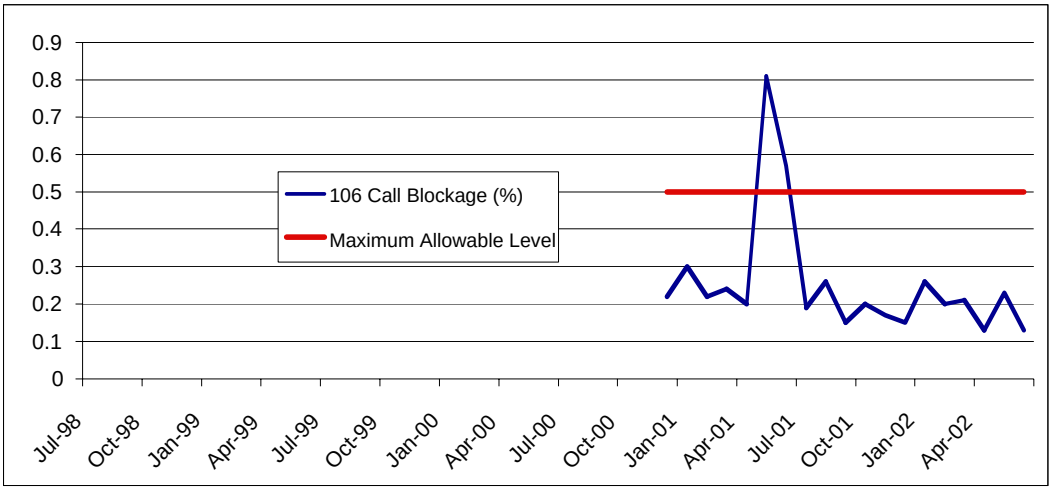


Source: ACA

iv. **No more than five text emergency services calls per 1000 into the NRS will receive a busy signal, based on a quarterly average.**

The text emergency number 106 was introduced in December 2000. It allows people who are deaf or have a hearing and/or speech impairment to access emergency services such as ambulance, police or fire using a text device such as a TTY or modem via the NRS. During the 6 months of the 2000–01 year that the service was in operation, the call blockage standard of 0.5 per cent of calls was exceeded in the June quarter. During 2001–02 ACE fully complied with this Service Standard with an average call blockage rate of 0.18 per cent.

Figure 1.4 Call Blockage of Emergency Calls (per cent)

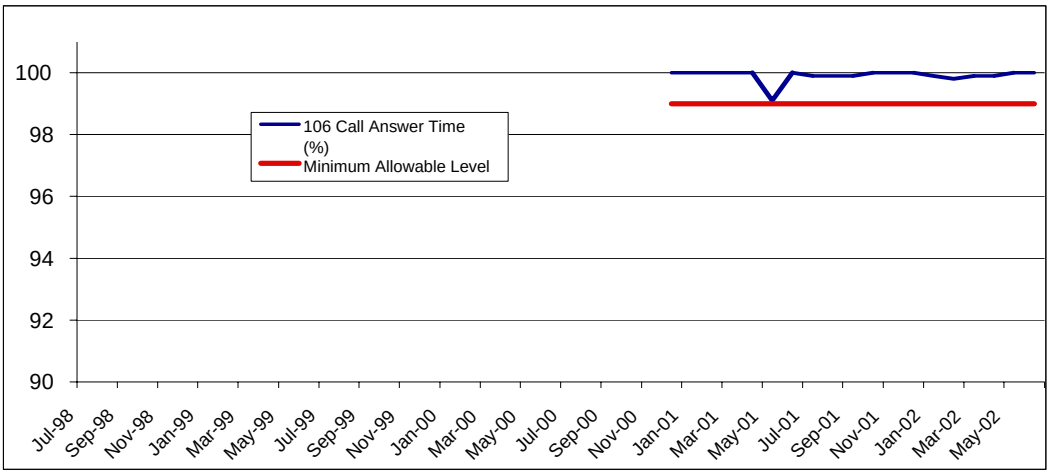


Source: ACA

v. **At least 99 per cent of text emergency service calls will be answered by the NRS within ten seconds, based on a quarterly average.**

ACE has fully complied with this Service Standard since the introduction of the emergency text service. As already detailed under Service Standard (ii), the use of an IVR means that unless ACE experiences serious technical difficulties, ACE is likely to comply with this Service Standard.

Figure 1.5 Emergency Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds (per cent)



Source: ACA

Overall, ACE's compliance with the five Service Standards has generally been sound with the exception of the call blockage standard. ACE has cited rostering and staff difficulties as the main reason for higher than acceptable call blockage rates during certain periods.