



# STOP SMART METERS AUSTRALIA INC

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Secretariat of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee  
OHCHR - United Nations Office at Geneva  
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Dear Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

## **New and emerging digital technologies and human rights**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee's report on the possible impacts, opportunities and challenges of new and emerging digital technologies with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Stop Smart Meters Australia (SSMA) is a volunteer-based consumer advocacy group which incorporated as an Association in April 2013 in response to widespread community objection to a government-mandated rollout of electricity smart meters in Victoria, Australia. Paramount within our legal purposes is providing support to Australians who have had their health adversely impacted by pulsed emissions from wireless smart meters. A significant portion of this cohort is also now sensitised to other sources of man-made electromagnetic radiation including WiFi, mobile phones and telecommunication towers.

In light of this, our submission focuses on human rights challenges resulting from digital technologies and addresses questions 2 and 3.

What are some of the key human rights challenges arising from new and emerging digital technologies?
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## **Electromagnetic hypersensitivity increasing in the population**

It appears that smart meters may have unique characteristics that have lowered people's threshold for the symptom development of electromagnetic hypersensitivity syndrome (Lamech 2014, p. 1). A number of our 600+ members and 6000+ website followers experience distressing symptoms following exposure to artificial radiation. Growing electro-pollution has severely impacted on sufferers' right to freedom of movement, right to work, their standard of living and right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community due to the impact on people's health and the need to minimise exposure to man-made radiation sources. This has resulted in high personal costs for a number of people (loss of

career, loss of income, loss of place in society, loss of access to public facilities, loss of friends and family) and their families as well as costs to the wider community.

The deployment by utilities of wireless smart meters and smart meter infrastructure emitting electromagnetic fields (EMF) has harmed people around the world. Reports from Victorians affected by smart meters are available [here](#). In written evidence provided to the UK Parliament's Energy and Climate Change Committee, it was stated that more than 10,000 health-related complaints were submitted to the California Public Utilities Commission alone in consequence of the installation of electricity smart meters; this included personal testimonies from medical doctors, psychotherapists and nurses in regard their own symptoms (Stop Smart Meters! 2013).

Many reports that have been given by EHS individuals to SSMA's website as well as elsewhere suggest that affected individuals, in being denied a choice to manage their own exposure to man-made EMF, are being deprived of their right to not be subjected to torture or to inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. This is in addition to curtailment of their right to liberty and security, as many individuals are now being denied access to parts of their homes and gardens due to the presence of smart meters or other nearby EMF-emitters; in some cases symptoms have been so severe that people have had to abandon their homes and are now reduced to camping out in national parks etc., in a bid to alleviate symptoms. People with EHS are also discriminated against as the growing prevalence of wireless technology now makes it difficult or impossible for many people to attend public events, utilise public transport, and access public services such as schools and hospitals.

Estimations of the number of people who are electrically sensitive vary. According to a research paper titled 'The Prevalence of People with Restricted Access to Work in Manmade Electromagnetic Environments', between about 5.0 and 30 per cent of the general population have a mild form of this condition. Moderate cases represent between 1.5 and 5.0 per cent of the population with a prevalence of less than 1.5 per cent for severe cases (Bevington 2019, p. 1).

### **Irreversible long-term health impacts on the population**

Exposure to man-made electromagnetic fields from smart meters and other devices as well as a result of the growing pollution of building wiring with high frequency voltage transients ('dirty electricity') is also implicated in serious long-term health outcomes. A report by Electrosensitivity UK references a wide body of scientific studies giving evidence of adverse biological outcomes (Bevington 2018).

As of 25 August, 2019, 250 EMF scientists from 42 nations had signed an International EMF Scientist Appeal calling for greater health protection from electromagnetic field exposure (International EMF Scientist Appeal 2019).

The Appeal states that:

"Numerous recent scientific publications have shown that EMF affects living organisms at levels well below most international and national guidelines. Effects include increased cancer risk, cellular stress, increase in harmful free radicals, genetic damages, structural and functional changes of the reproductive system, learning and memory deficits, neurological disorders, and negative impacts on general well-being in humans. Damage goes well beyond the human race, as there is growing evidence of harmful effects to both plant and animal life."

Long-term adverse outcomes impact on a number of different human rights. For instance, Dr Isaac Jamieson points out that the decrease in fertility due to exposure to radiofrequency radiation affects the right, set out in article 12 of the UK Human Rights Act 1998, to marry and have a family as well as the right to life, which is set out in article 2 of this Act (Jamieson 2011, pp. 43-48).

How can these risks be mitigated?

### **Hazard warnings on EMF-emitters should be mandatory**

Many people are unwittingly exposing themselves and their children to EMF, such as from WiFi-enabled printers and cordless phones; often the wireless capability is not even a function which is required 24/7, if at all.

It is essential that all devices that emit EMF carry warning notices. A paper published in September 2019 by the Russian National Committee on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection calls for the release of new EMF hazard warning signs for mobile phones and other EMF sources (EM Radiation Research Trust). Specific warning signs have been developed for pregnant women and children under 16.

### **Individuals should be given the right to manage their own EMF exposure levels**

Mandatory deployment of wireless smart meters and other telecommunications infrastructure such as towers and small cells (5G) denies the right of individuals to make their own decisions about the level of EMF that they are exposed to within their own homes and in public spaces. In the case of children and foetuses, government has a specific duty of care to ensure exposure is minimised.

### **Public buildings and spaces need to minimise EMF sources**

It is critical that people with EHS are not denied access to public facilities and spaces.

The European Parliament passed a resolution on 2 April 2009, entitled *Health concerns associated with electromagnetic fields*, which includes in its provisions that ‘schools, crèches, retirement homes, and health care institutions are kept clear, within a specific distance determined by scientific criteria’, of all facilities involving the installation of equipment transmitting electromagnetic fields (European Parliament, clause 8).

Unfortunately, in Australia, there has been no recognition of the effects of EMF on the population and no attempt is being made to minimise EMF in public spaces.

Do new and emerging digital technologies create unique and unprecedented challenges or are there earlier precedents that help us understand the issue area?

SSMA considers that wireless digital technologies create a unique and unprecedented challenge as humans are unable to see, hear, smell or taste these frequencies. This makes managing exposure levels to EMF pollutants challenging, especially as the majority of the population lacks the technical equipment to measure emissions.

Is the existing international human rights framework adequate to safeguard human rights in an era of rapid technological innovation? Why or why not? If not, what types of reforms are needed?

The rapid proliferation of wireless technology has given rise to many unintended consequences. There has been no requirement for industry to adopt a precautionary approach and no onus on industry to prove that emissions are safe prior to the rollout of new technology. The only proviso is that individual EMF sources comply with guidelines or standards, which vary wildly across different jurisdictions, and which have for the most part been formulated in response to outdated theory. Reform that specifically targets the harmful effects of technology is urgently needed.

In the current climate there is no requirement for industry to provide wireless devices which can readily have the wireless component disabled. There is no incentive to provide wired, as opposed to wireless, technology. There is also little incentive to manage electricity infrastructure to ensure that unwanted pollutants as a result of technology such as smart meter switch-mode power supplies and power line communications are not riding on and emanating from building wiring, as well as causing ground currents. There is also no onus on industry to consider the fact that today’s consumers are exposed to multiple sources of artificial radiation, leading to cumulative effects.

It is essential that the human rights framework specifically safeguards humans’ right to a natural EMF environment rather than to being exposed to escalating levels of artificial EMF. According to Professor Olle Johansson we, along with all life, are being bathed in background levels of microwave radiation which have increased *one million billion times* or

more in recent times (Johansson 2013, p. 7). The human body is, as is all life on this planet, the outcome of exposure to a unique EMF environment. It would be presumptuous to imagine, given the very large body of scientific evidence to the contrary, that long-term consequences won't result from this drastic alteration to our environment.

SSMA trusts that the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee will take on board our comments. The uncontrolled and unprecedented rollout of digital technology, whilst conferring many positive outcomes, has led to a number of unintended consequences, in particular due to its (often unnecessary) reliance on wireless technology. It is essential that people are able to access digital technologies in a manner that is not injurious to health.

We look forward to a human rights framework that recognises the challenges that digital technology brings, and one that is more protective of human rights in the light of this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Janobai Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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