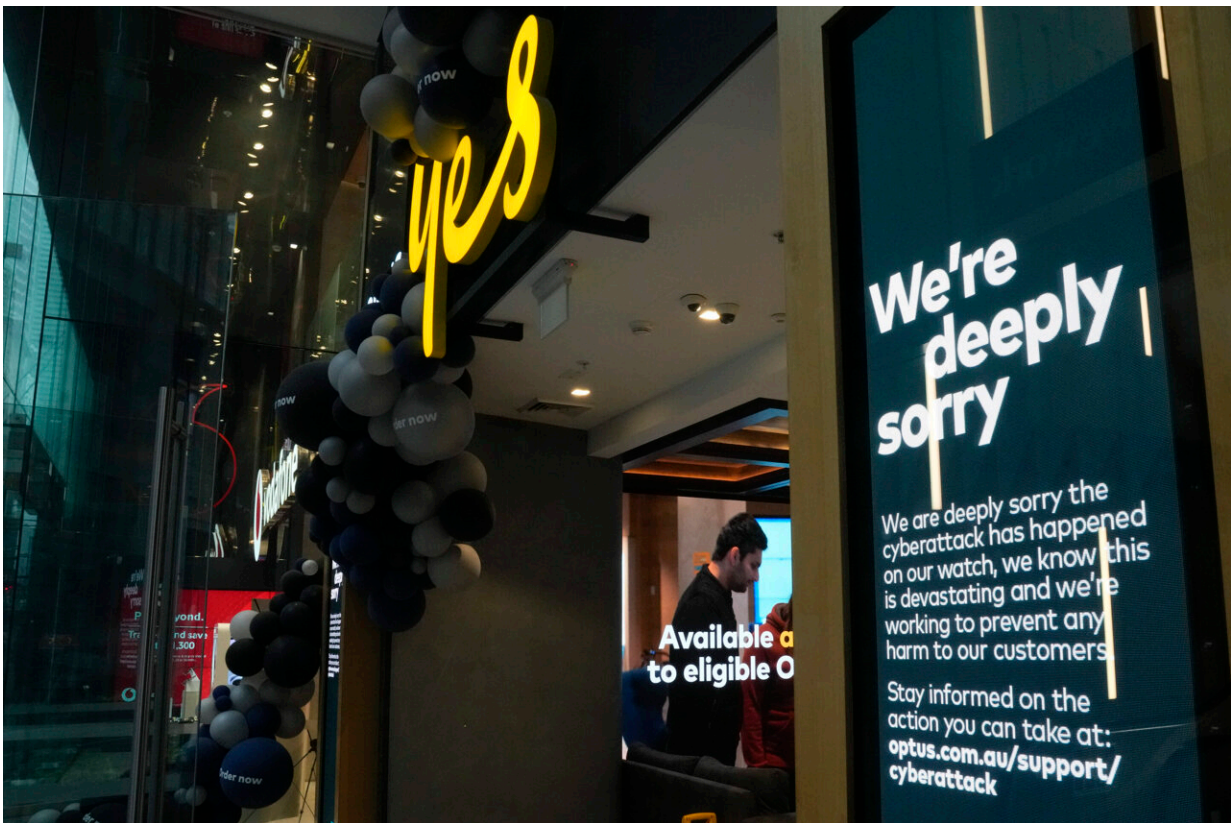


# Australian police make first arrest in Optus hack probe

October 6 2022, by ROD McGUIRK

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Electronic signage at an Optus telecommunications retail store is seen at the central business district of Sydney, Australia, Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2022. The government has announced changes to telecommunications law, Thursday, Oct. 6 to protect customers of Australia's second-largest wireless carrier, Optus, whose personal details were stolen in a major cyberattack. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

A police investigation of a cyberattack on an Australian telecommunications company in which the personal data of more than one third of Australia's population was stolen has resulted in its first arrest, investigators said Thursday.

Police launched Operation Hurricane in cooperation with the U.S. Federal Bureau Investigation after Optus, Australia's second-largest wireless carrier, lost the [personal records](#) of 9.8 million current and former customers on Sept. 21.

The hacker dumped the records of 10,000 of those customers on the dark web last week as part of an attempt to extort \$1 million from Optus, a subsidiary of Singapore Telecommunications Ltd., also known as Singtel.

A 19-year-old Sydney man was arrested on Thursday and charged with using the dumped data in a text message blackmail scam, police said in a statement.

The man, who has not been identified publicly, has yet to appear in court on two charges that carry [prison sentences](#) of up to 10 and seven years.

Police allege he sent text messages to 93 Optus customers demanding 2,000 Australian dollars (\$1,300) be deposited in a bank account or the data would be used in a financial crime. None of the targets paid.

One of the extortion targets, identified only as Belinda and described as a mother of a 5-year-old child with cancer, told Nine Network News last week, "To be honest, it's just not what we need."

"I guess they're just trying to hopefully pressure people into paying," she told Nine.

Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Justine Gough said the investigation is continuing.

"The Hurricane investigation is a high priority for the AFP and we are aggressively pursuing all lines of inquiry to identify those behind the attack," Gough said.

"Just because there has been one arrest does not mean there won't be any more arrests," she added.

The Australian government announced changes to its telecommunications law to protect vulnerable Optus customers.

The changes to the Telecommunications Regulations allow Optus and other providers to better coordinate with [financial institutions](#) and governments to detect and mitigate the risk of cybersecurity incidents, fraud, scams and other malicious cyber activities, a government statement said.

Optus ran full-page ads in Australian newspapers on Saturday under the headline, "We're deeply sorry."

The ad included a link to an Optus website that details actions that customers can take to avoid [identity theft](#) and fraud.

The government can change regulations without legislative approval. But the government hopes to pass changes to the Privacy Act in Parliament during the final four weeks of its 2022 session in response to the Optus breach.

The changes would include increased penalties for companies with lax cybersecurity protections and curbs on the quantities and types of [customer](#) data that businesses can amass, as well as the duration for

which personal information can be kept.

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Citation: Australian police make first arrest in Optus hack probe (2022, October 6) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-10-australian-police-optus-hack-probe.html>

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