

21 February 2011

The Chairman  
Senate Committee inquiry into the National Broadband Network Companies Bill  
Canberra ACT

Dear sir/madam

**Senate Committee inquiry into the National Broadband Network Companies Bill**

Thank you for the invitation to lodge a submission regarding the National Broadband Network (NBN) with the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee.

Let me open by saying that my technical knowledge of communication systems does not allow me to comment on the pros and cons of the actual proposed network and its makeup. I would like to focus my submission on the supporting infrastructure and the importance of the role this infrastructure plays in whether or not the NBN is able to achieve its strategic objective.

To fully explain my thoughts I must take you back to 1994 when my wife and I experienced, firsthand, the 1994 Como (Sydney) bushfires where many homes and one life were lost. On that Saturday afternoon while we were ringed by flames and smoke we felt helpless as we had no power or communication with the outside world, bar an old battery driven transistor radio and the ABC. With the initial advance of the fire our power poles literally blew up with the heat and brought down our aerial power and telephone lines thus isolating the community. It is now 17 years on and we still live in a bushfire prone area with aerial power and aerial copper wire telephone lines

In the meantime there have been many instances, including Black Saturday and the recent floods, cyclones and fires where we could have learnt but we find that with the advent of each catastrophic event we still immediately hear of how fallen power lines and poles wiping out the power supply and blocking roads. Indeed in instances such as Black Saturday and Toodyay WA we find that it was fallen power lines that actually started the fires. How frustrating is this for us to find that in this day and age communities are still experiencing the fears and dangers that we felt many years ago.

The stringing protocols of the NBN now bring further frustration as it is proposed that our aerial telephone lines will be replaced with an aerial NBN. In its wisdom NBNC0 recently entered into an agreement with Origin Energy in Townsville to string the NBN on Origin's poles. We now find that Cyclone Yasi hit the Queensland Tropical Coast and brought down aerial power and telecommunication wires right along the coast, including the NBN in Townsville. As I understand it NBNC0 will now restring its cable between the poles. Surely this a false economy and a waste of tax payers money.

Next time we, in Bonnet bay and Como, have a bushfire we will find that it won't be our copper wires which come down but the communication system of the next millennium, the NBN. The NBN will, of course, join the power lines and once again we will have no power or communication – Groundhog Day.

The government and NBNC0 must now look to the future and where it is found that a community still relies on already antiquated and unreliable, aerial communication cables they must see this as an opportunity to provide that community with a strategically safe and reliable communication system by undergrounding the NBN. Those concerned could show further initiative by entering into a cost efficient agreement with the relevant State Government to underground power cables at the same time.

I would hate this opportunity pass where we do not enter into nation building and, once again, focussing, not on quality but on the political consequences of speed and cost. If we don't, everytime we have a natural disaster we will continue to lose infrastructure, livelihoods and even lives due to the ineptness and negligence of our decision makers.

Yours faithfully

Greg Bleazard  
Executive  
Cables Downunder