

Submission 069
Date received: 24/02/2011



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Date: 23 February 2011

Mr Andrew McGowan
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email to: ic.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr McGowan

Re: New Inquiry into the National Broadband Network

I refer to your letter dated 9 December 2010 inviting Council's comments on the capacity of the National Broadband Network to contribute to the range of points of interest referred to in the terms of reference. I thank you for the opportunity and provide below Council comments for your consideration.

A) Delivery of Government Services and Programs

The NBN has the potential to provide local government with significant cost efficiencies and increased service and information accessibility benefits for the local community. It will also provide better opportunities to access the operational advantages of online storage and cloud computing. New internet based technologies allow for increased customer interaction and will help improve the efficiencies of government services dispersed across the region. Consistent high speed connections will broaden service operations that currently exist but are not provided due to concerns about minimum standards of community internet access. The NBN will significantly help reduce the operational cost penalty of distance within the region.

B) Achieving Health Outcomes

The provision of a high speed broadband network will improve the standard and range of health services provided within the region. Health technologies have developed at rapid rates and regional communities are being restricted access to these technologies due to lack of bandwidth. The advantages of real time diagnosis, data sharing and remote access to specialist medical services will deliver significant benefits to our regional communities.



C) Improving the Educational Resources and Training Available for Teachers and Students

The internet and computer based programs are transforming our approach to all levels of education and learning. As we innovate and develop our skills the demand for high speed data transfer significantly increases. The implementation of the NBN will provide for regional teachers and students to have the best access to internet based learning systems, software and information ensuring that they are no longer disadvantaged by their remoteness. With the rapid pace of technology change we also need to encourage lifelong learning in all of our community members so they have the capacity to access the emerging social, economic and environmental services being increasingly provided over the internet.

D) The Management of Australia's Built and Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability

High speed internet access will enable agribusiness, catchment management groups and environmental management organisations to access new forms of data collection and analysis that will in turn improve the quality of local decision making. As rural industries move to more scientific management systems for water, soil quality, cropping and animal production the need for real time data collection and analysis is becoming essential to ensure the environmental and economic sustainability of the region.

E) Impacting Regional Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities

The NBN provides one of the few viable options to generate long term, high skilled and well paid local jobs for regional communities. In fact, the lack of high speed access is the major deterrent to the growth of high skilled jobs within the region. High speed broadband access will enable greater local choice and help reduce supply costs to residents through increased competition. For business it will open new market opportunities as the traditional regional barrier of distance is removed.

F) Impacting Business Efficiencies and Revenues, Particularly for Small and Medium business, and Australia's Export Market

Small business is at the heart of servicing regional lifestyle and provides the majority of employment opportunities. The implementation of the NBN will provide practical advantages to local business operations such as the use of cloud computing, data storage and information management as well as assisting with cost efficiencies of businesses with multiple locations within the region. The commitment to the NBN also encourages existing businesses to embrace the necessary ecommerce changes they need to implement to ensure their future profitability.

G) Interaction with Research and Development and Related Innovation Investments

Regional Australia has thrived on its ability to innovate. The spirit of innovation sits deep within our communities and the NBN provides a new opportunity to encourage further innovation and research. There is no doubt that that other countries are much further advanced with providing high speed access to their community and if we wish to continue our history of innovation we need to act quickly. The delivery of high speed access to our region will encourage new opportunities for partnerships with universities and other research centres as well as enable the expansion of existing specialist knowledge areas.

H) Facilitating Community and Social benefits

The broad scale adoption of various social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, forums, blogs etc. clearly establishes the community's increasing desire for this form of communication and networking. This has been particularly evident in the recent

flooding disasters where social media provided a key communication tool for the local community. Connection and collaboration are the paradigms of the future at every level of decision making. Healthy and vibrant communities of the future will be those that are well connected. The more we can assist social interaction the stronger our local character and identity.

I) The Optimal Capacity and Technological Requirements of a Network to Deliver these Outcomes

The delivery of a stable, high speed and fair priced data network to regional communities is a critical investment in the future of Regional Australia. It is important to state that the most significant benefit to the sustainable future of regional communities will be the fibre footprint within the regional towns. The commercial access to these footprints is critical for the new knowledge worker businesses to relocate and bring their families to experience our great regional lifestyle. Only the speed of fibre connection will enable our regional towns to secure significant new businesses and employment of a scale that can balance the increasing demands of our aging communities and declining agricultural workforce.

Goondiwindi Regional Council is currently developing its long term community plan. Significant community engagement has been undertaken and the key outcomes based on community priorities are the advancement of digital communications to advance education, health and business opportunities for our Region. As with most communities in regional and rural Australia, Council and our communities recognised that action needs to be taken now to address the impacts of ageing and to encourage families to relocate and return to the regions. The delivery of reliable, affordable and improved digital technology services is the key to enabling this to occur.

Once again I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Cr Graeme Scheu
MAYOR