



Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications
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Re: Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network

The Illawarra Business Chamber (IBC) represents over 700 businesses in the Illawarra region of NSW. Our members cover a wide range of industry sectors and range in size from sole traders to multi-national corporations. We welcome this opportunity to provide feedback to the Standing Committee on our perspective on the role and potential of the National Broadband Network.

In its 2010 publication *Catalyst Projects: a business perspective*, the IBC identified the NBN as one of the key priority projects for our region. This report identified that *"The NBN has the potential to deliver significant efficiency and productivity gains to the business community which could flow through to increase employment opportunities in the region, especially if the daily leakage of commuter spending can be stemmed."* The NBN was also listed as a key piece of infrastructure in the IBC's *10 Big Ideas to Grow the Illawarra*, which was released in October 2010.

The Illawarra is located immediately south of Australia's global city of Sydney. This is both a positive and a negative for the local community. On a positive note, businesses have a large market of potential clients and customers on their doorstep and employees can access the Sydney jobs market. But on the downside, accessing this market – whether as an employee or a business – can involve significant travel times along one of Australia's busiest commuter corridors.

The NBN will, in effect, bring Sydney closer to the Illawarra. Local businesses, especially those delivering professional services, will be able to service clients without leaving the region. Many employees currently travelling to Sydney every day will have increased telecommuting opportunities if they have access to reliable, high-speed broadband to the home.

The NBN will also make the Illawarra a more attractive place to locate a business for operations currently based in Sydney. In particular, professional service based industries, would find the region highly attractive if they could communicate with their clients as if they were in the same city. This could be particularly important for the emerging business precinct of the Innovation Campus, which is aiming to attract technical and research based businesses which often require links across Australia and internationally.

The NBN will also act as a catalyst for new industry sectors to emerge in the Illawarra. Finance, IT and professional services are already starting to grow in the region and would receive a further boost from an early roll-out of the NBN.

One of the region's most important sectors is education, led by the tertiary institutions of the University of Wollongong and the numerous TAFE campuses in the Illawarra. Access to high-speed reliable broadband will increase the opportunity for collaborative work and study with other institutions and encourage this key sector to continue to grow.

More new businesses and growing existing businesses should help to reduce regional unemployment rates, which are persistently at least 1% point above the Australian average. Youth unemployment is particularly high in the region, in recent times it has been over 25%.

Bringing Sydney closer to the Illawarra, via the NBN, not only delivers economic benefits – it will also deliver improved social and community outcomes. Less travel time means more time to spend with family or on recreational activities. This will be a significant positive for the 20,000 commuters that travel to Sydney each day for work and study.



The NBN also has the potential to ease pressure on the already stretched transport links between Sydney and the Illawarra. Fewer commuters will reduce congestion on the F6 and the Illawarra passenger rail line – two links that are already operating near capacity at peak travel times.

Despite the region's proximity to Sydney broadband coverage is currently patchy, with many businesses (including home-based businesses) forced to use slower or less reliable technology such as mobile or ADSL or even dial-up connections.

The location of a test site for the NBN in Kiama has increased focus on the NBN in the region and the IBC believes the region is well placed to be an early roll-out site once testing in Kiama is completed.

Once again, the IBC appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Should you have any questions about this submission please contact the IBC on [redacted] IBC representatives will also be available to appear before the Committee should it hold a hearing in the Illawarra.

Regards

Greg Fisher
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