



Submission 6

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Contact: Allan Young

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

Dear Mr McGowan

New Inquiry into the National Broadband Network

On behalf of Mayor Slack I thank your Committee for the opportunity to make comments on this new inquiry.

Gloucester Shire is a small rural Council and is strategically located and recognized as being part of the Upper Hunter Region and also part of the Mid North Coast Region for various government services and funding programs.

The Shire has a population of approximately 5,000 people with about 2,500 in the main town of Gloucester and the balance of 2,500 located in either the village settlements of Barrington, Bundook, Copeland, Craven and Stratford or on rural landholdings of varying sizes.

Gloucester shire Council sees the rollout of the National Broadband Network as providing economic opportunities for business growth with the ultimate possibility of increasing the population of the Shire. Such an assumption is based on the ability to conduct successful business activities from a regional location on an equal footing to those in high population locations. The economic return to the small to medium businesses within our Shire would hopefully be substantial.

There is also reason to believe that by making this advanced communication medium available to Gloucester Shire there will be innovative advantages for health and allied health services that are currently provided to the people of the Shire, as well as, improvements to the delivery of educational services to assist both students and teachers in local schools.

There are of course some concerns relating to the rollout of the National Broadband Network to areas such as Gloucester Shire. Such concerns are:-

1. Gloucester's location shows that the network cabling will be brought to the town and surrounding rural areas from the city of Taree. While this in itself is acceptable the major question is; "when will the cable be brought to Gloucester?" It is possible that the NBN Co will push to have major towns and cities connected first so as to generate greater income earlier in the rollout cycle with towns such

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as Gloucester being left until the last years of the project. If this is the process, other larger population centres will benefit at the cost of smaller population centres and may in fact contribute to the economic demise of these rural towns. Therefore, it is respectfully suggested that the inquiry seriously consider ways to adequately address this concern.

2. It is understood that the National Broadband cable will not be hooked up to towns with fewer than 1,000 premises due to the high cost of connection. If in reality this is going to be the practice of NBN Co, how is the rollout of this program going to benefit the residents of the Gloucester Shire who will not be able to gain connection to this cable and to an internet service that can offer possible speeds of up to 100 megabits per second? How does such an arrangement demonstrate the ability of this network to deliver to the Shire residents the benefits and improved outcomes set out in points (a) to (i) of your letter of 9 December 2010? Once again, it is respectfully requested that the Standing Committee is aware of and genuinely considers the issue raised in this paragraph.
3. Access to the service needs to be affordable. This project is aimed at delivering significant economic and productivity benefits not only for the Gloucester Shire but for the nation, however, common sense and logic indicates that there is no point in building something that people simply cannot afford to use. Internet users need to be encouraged to embrace this new fast fibre technology. There is obviously a requirement for uniform pricing of various National Broadband Network internet packages to be available to consumers to ensure high consumer take up of this service. In this regard the Standing Committee is requested to consider making a recommendation whereby regional Australians will not be disadvantaged and will not have to pay more than city consumers for internet access under the National Broadband Network.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to this new inquiry into the National Broadband Network.

Yours faithfully

Allan Young
GENERAL MANAGER