

Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

Connecting the Northern Rivers to Opportunities

community — environment — economy



Regional
Development
Australia
NORTHERN RIVERS NSW

23 February 2011

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Infrastructure & Communications
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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers (RDA-Northern Rivers) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications Inquiry into the National Broadband Network on behalf of our communities and the critical industries within our geographic area.

The attached submission highlights the particular circumstances of the Northern Rivers and its population in respect to health, education and regional economic growth benefits for our rural communities.

RDA Northern Rivers has recently commissioned a survey and report of high-speed broadband enablers within critical industries. Unfortunately this information will not be available until May 2011, but if possible we would appreciate an opportunity to forward any additional information that we gather from this process once complete if possible.

RDA Northern Rivers is also a member of Eastern Regional Digital Corridor, an alliance of four RDAs from the Central Coast to the Queensland border. We are collaborating together to find the most appropriate opportunity for the RDAs to assist with the broadband rollout in regional NSW.

We feel the Northern Rivers, in particular could represent an exemplar for regional and remote communities and the opportunity the NBN rollout will provide.

Please do not hesitate to contact for any additional information.

Yours sincerely,

Katrina Luckie
CEO



An Australian Government Initiative



A NSW Government Initiative

House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into the National Broadband Network

Submission from

Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers

February 2011

Introduction

Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers (RDA-NR) is a non-profit community-based and regionally focused organisation that connects people and businesses in our region to opportunities through partnerships focusing on community, environment and economy. It is part of Regional Development Australia (RDA), a nation-wide initiative based on building partnerships and encouraging all governments and stakeholders to be responsive to local priorities and needs.

- RDA-NR serves as a conduit between government and local communities, and is both a source and a provider of information.
- RDA-NR serves as a strong advocate and driver of change for the Northern Rivers.
- RDA-NR also plays a pivotal role in ensuring the long term sustainability of the Northern Rivers region.

Approximately half the region's population is concentrated on the coast in the centres of Tweed Heads, Murwillumbah, Ballina, Lismore, Casino, Kyogle, Yamba and Grafton. The Northern Rivers also has a dispersed settlement pattern, and over half of the region's population lives in the 300 small villages or localities scattered throughout the region (from the coast to hinterland). The Far North Coast Regional Strategy recognises the village settlement pattern as a key element in past and future growth of the Northern Rivers region. The region's high ageing population poses specific challenges and requirements regarding the provision of services and facilities to support this sector. The topography of the area limits access to Broadband services.

RDA-NR recognises high speed broadband as marking a generational change in the way Australians communicate with each other and do business both domestically and internationally. Implications for regional Australia are double edged - with it regional Australia has an opportunity to compete in markets and services currently closed to it - without it regional Australia is guaranteed to see a widening of the existing differences between regional and capital city household incomes.

As we progress into the age of the digital economy it becomes increasingly evident that a high speed affordable communication network will enhance our economic, employment, health, education and social sustainability and revolutionise the development of business and community.

Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

Why regional Australia AND the Northern Rivers need Broadband

Broadband communications networks are a critical enabling technology and a major contributor to regional productivity and growth. It is an enabler of structural change and will:

- speed up online procedures and processes;
- deliver faster downloads AND uploading speeds;
- improve competitiveness, especially in the creative industries in the Northern Rivers;
- allow more flexible working arrangements;
- facilitate delivery of a wide range of services across all sectors of our economy including, health, education and commerce; and
- bridge the 'digital divide' that currently exists between regional and urban Australia.

RDA-NR recognises that the NBN infrastructure is a key driver of regional economic growth because it enables both the development and intensification of a networked economy. Businesses, particularly, 'knowledge-based' business, will only grow or be attracted to the Northern Rivers if they have access to up-to-date infrastructure and skilled people.

Benefits of Broadband access to the Northern Rivers

Delivery of Government Services and Programs

A number of government services have their regional offices located in the Northern Rivers: including the State Emergency Services for the Northern Rivers. As a flood prone area reliance on uploading and downloading of information on river heights and road conditions is essential to providing accurate information to ensure community safety and flood height predictions.

In the 2010/2011 flooding throughout the Northern Rivers the SES relied on information from residents and other services as to flood heights and road conditions. Much of this was provided via copper wire phone connections, mobile phone and internet services throughout the valleys affected.

The communities of the Northern Rivers are subject to extreme weather events flooding annually, bush fires in our extensive national park and reserves which spread to neighboring residential and farming community areas. It is expected that specialised applications utilising high speed broadband will assist in keeping emergency services staff well connected to fire information, breaks and movement, offer advanced warnings to communities in jeopardy and provide a safety net of vital information.

The Northern Rivers SES has also just introduced I Phone applications which rely on a highspeed broadband for uploading of data. A broadband network which can safeguard communications and current information for SES staff is vital for safety of the whole community.

Achieving Health Outcomes

What is E-Health?

E-Health is both the essential infrastructure underpinning information exchange between all participants in our health care system as well as a key enabler and driver of improved health outcomes for all Australians. The World Health Organisation defines E-Health as 'the combined use of electronic communication and information technology in the health sector.' The Australian Health Minister's Conference, National E-Health Strategy December 2008 states that "*E-health will enable a safer, higher quality, more equitable and sustainable health system for all Australians by transforming the way information is used to plan manage and deliver health care services.*"

E-Health provides:

- the means to ensure that the right health information is provided to the right person at the right place and time in a secure, electronic form for the purpose of optimizing the quality and efficiency of health care delivery;
- opportunities for remote and rural communities to access diagnostic and treatment services via real time video from medical and health practitioners currently unavailable within easy geographic access;
- equity of access to services currently unavailable in remote, rural and Indigenous communities through video and diagnostic technology ;
- a range of Telehealth options for seniors to remain in their own homes but with health, medical and social support and monitoring through electronic communication devices; and
- a key to enable and drive improved health outcomes.

Health Sector Trends in the Northern Rivers

Our health sector faces a set of increasingly significant challenges if we are to continue to deliver high standards of health outcomes in the Northern Rivers. These include:

- significant differences between the health outcomes for advantaged and disadvantaged people who live in our region, particularly Indigenous Australians;
- delivery of health services to more remote and rural inland communities;
- a large and growing ageing population;
- a significant and growing incidence of chronic disease;
- increased demand for more costly, complex and technologically advanced procedures; and
- the supply and distribution of skilled health sector workers is limited.

Regional Australia is facing real challenges in finding sufficient numbers of skilled health care workers across many parts of the sector to satisfy current as well as future, levels of demand. For the past 10 years the Northern Rivers experience has gone against the national trend, largely due to many health professionals relocating to the Northern Rivers for lifestyle choices.

However, that luxury of access to a sufficient supply of health providers varies hugely throughout the region, with many locating to the coastal towns and leaving those rural inland communities with limited access to health practitioner services.

The main public provider of health services in our region is the Northern NSW Local Health Network (NNLHN). Services range from population health (health promotion, disease prevention, public health and screening) through acute care services, rehabilitation and palliative care and community care nursing, allied health therapy services. Movement out of our region for health services is largely to tertiary facilities in Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane. However the local Health network is increasing its provision of high level care, and reducing the need for our residents to travel to receive care out of the area.

Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

The increase in population and ageing has resulted in a marked increase in activity across NNLHN resulting in a sustained rise in emergency department presentations and occupancy rates across acute services. There is recognition that hospital can be a stressful environment, particularly for older people, and the desire of patients and their families to be actively engaged in their health care present new challenges for delivery of health care services. Increasing demand has led to the development of new models of care including inpatient and community packages.

At its core, health is a knowledge industry with information being central to all aspects of care planning, management and delivery. Despite this, the primary information tools used to manage health care in this country still revolve around pen, paper and human memory. The use of such fallible tools to manage a sector as complex and critical as health care should be a cause of profound concern for 21st century Australia. (*National E Health Strategy Summary December 2008*)

The health care sector in regional Australia struggles to share potentially critical patient information between service providers within the same post code. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Australia's Health 2002*, estimated that 18% of medical errors are due to inadequate availability of consumer information.

Our Ageing Population and E-Health

Our health services support one of the fastest growing seniors' populations in Australia, the number of people over 65 years in our region is increasing dramatically. The Northern Rivers is an attractive destination for retirement and we have a significantly high proportion of people aged 65 years with a high projected growth rate (see Table 1). Along with this growth rate comes the increased prevalence and incidence of aged related disease.

Aged care services aim to provide an integrated system approach to encourage and support older members of our community to remain in their own home. These are supported by acute facilities, day centres, and a range of Primary and Community Health settings. Generally services are provided in collaboration with GPs, NGOs, Aboriginal Medical Services and other Government organisations.

Table 1: Projected number and proportion of residents aged 65yrs and over by LGA and Network, 2006 to 2016

Network	LGA	2006		2011		2016	
		No	% of population	No	% of population	No	% of population
Tweed	Byron	3,577	11.6	4,137	12.5	5,279	14.9
	- Byron	18,044	21.7	20,782	22.6	24,875	24.6
	Total	21,621	19	24,919	19.9	30,154	22.1
	Ballina	7,718	19.1	8,603	19.9	10,149	22.0
Richmond	Kyogle	1,461	15.1	1,564	16.3	1,813	19.2
	Lismore	5,868	13.2	6,308	13.9	7,368	15.9
	Richmond Valley	3,866	17.4	4,291	18.8	4,971	21.1
Clarence Valley	Total	18,913	16.2	20,765	17.2	24,301	19.4
	Clarence Valley	9,461	18.8	11,124	21.4	13,290	24.8

Source: ABS estimated resident populations and NSW Health Population Projection Series 1, 2009 ASGC 2006 (HOIST)

With a focus on lifestyle, maintenance of independence and community connectedness aged services aim to provide an integrated system approach to encourage and support seniors to remain in their own homes.

Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

Telehealthcare technologies have been introduced into the homes of seniors requiring monitoring and support to live independently or for those who care for a person with support needs. Telehealth is designed to support individuals who:

- have chronic conditions such as:
 - chronic heart failure (CHF);
 - chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD);
 - unstable blood pressure;
 - diabetes;
- may require daily health supervision and monitoring;
- may live remotely where access to a GP is difficult; and/or
- may require post hospital care.

A few aged services providers in Australia have adopted this technology and extensive trials have been conducted on the North Coast and Gold Coast by Feros Care Ltd. At the cutting edge is the technology which works in partnership with those monitoring their own critical health conditions. Telehealth enables the reliable collection and secure transmission of the individuals' vital signs and related health information to a secure website. The data is accessed securely by clinical health professionals to help early intervention and informed decision-making about health and well-being. This technology has the capacity to:

- assist people to maintain their independence;
- develop partnership between the individual and the health practitioner in maintaining wellbeing;
- provide regular health monitoring (remotely) by a designated monitoring health practitioner;
- efficacious use of GP time in early intervention where monitoring indicates an intervention is required; and
- provide health care assistance to those in rural and remote areas.

It is designed to support those living with single or multiple long term conditions. Encouraging individuals to become active participants in their health care management, monitoring immediate changes in vital signs resulting from modifications to medication, diet, exercise or other lifestyle factors.

Increasingly, this technology will require high speed broadband technology to ensure security and speed of down and upload of information via monitoring devices to health practitioners to ensure safety and wellbeing of those being monitored.

Why the Northern Rivers needs to expand its E-Health capabilities

E Health Records

E-Health will ensure the right consumer health information is electronically available to the right person at the right place and time to enable informed care and treatment decisions, it will also:

- enable our health sector to operate more effectively as an inter-connected system overcoming the current fragmentation and duplication of current service delivery;
- provide residents of the Northern Rivers with electronic access to the information needed to better manage and control their personal health outcomes;
- enable multi-disciplinary teams to communicate electronically and exchange information and provide better coordinated health care across the continuum of care;
- provide our residents with confidence that their personal health information is managed in a secure, confidential and tightly controlled manner;
- enable electronic access to appropriate health care services for those living in rural and disadvantaged communities;

Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

- facilitate continuous improvement of the health system in the Northern Rivers through more effective reporting and sharing of health outcome information;
- improve the quality, safety and efficiency of clinical practices by giving care providers better access to health information, clinical evidence and clinical decision support tools for our residents; and
- support more informed policy, investment and research decisions through access to timely, accurate and comprehensive reporting on health system activities and outcomes within the Northern Rivers.

E Health diagnostics and treatment in remote and rural communities

The Northern Rivers represents many isolated and remote communities including a number of Indigenous communities. These communities are often targeted for health intervention campaigns due to reported poor health outcome. Enabling electronic access to diagnostic and treatment and Telehealthcare options for remote and rural communities will improve:

- equity of access to health services – great distances to travel for medical and health treatment is expensive and a disincentive to access the services both available and required;
- existing community based technology centres which facilitate access by the communities (the CTC network in NSW) thus providing a centre-based model and an access point for consumers;
- improved early diagnosis and treatment of conditions which may lead to complications if left untreated; and
- infant and maternal health outcomes with video links to medical practitioners where none currently exist in remote communities for early monitoring with then nurse practitioner oversight.

Summary of E-Health Benefits

Developments in e-health are inextricably linked to high speed broadband networks:

- **E-Health delivers improved access to doctors and specialists**

Through services such as high definition videoconferencing or the ability to send test results immediately over the internet for analysis with results transmitted back, high-speed broadband will reduce the need to travel and improve the speed with which this information is currently processed. Patients may be able to consult a specialist from their own home or a local GP's office through videoconferencing and data and high quality image transfers. This will enable early diagnosis and also after treatment services by health professionals.

- **More accurate information**

High-speed broadband, along with unique health identification and authentication of Australian consumers and care providers, allows access to a patient's records system via a secure means. Patients may choose to have their medical history securely stored and accessed in a central location rather than have different information stored with the different health practitioners they may have seen over several years. By allowing doctors, nurses and other health professionals to access centrally-based information and medical images securely, and in a way that respects patient confidentiality, vital information – such as past treatments or drug allergies – can be transmitted to save time and, potentially, lives.

- **Allowing people to stay at home longer**

Australia faces an ageing population and *the North Coast in particular expects that the majority of the population will be aged between 50-90 years of age in 2027, compared to a majority of people aged between 20-45 years of age for NSW as a whole.*

Innovative approaches and use of assistive technology will allow people to stay in their homes longer with safety and a better quality of life. Assistive technologies include an enormous range of

links to emergency response services, products which enable people to take control of their health conditions with on-line support from health providers and services. Online services will allow improved access to doctors and health professionals no matter where they are located. Basic home support services such as wound monitoring, blood pressure and diabetes monitoring in addition to the personal and domestic care required such as grocery shopping, utility bill payment and banking will assist with quality of life and maintain independence for more seniors in the Northern Rivers.

- **Expand social networking to vulnerable, at risk groups**

A high-speed affordable network will deliver greater social networking possibilities to those at risk communities or vulnerable people. Rural populations especially youth in the Northern Rivers as in other rural communities have been the target of many suicide prevention campaigns. A high speed broadband network could provide mental health service professionals with better access to this 'at risk' group of for support counselling and health promotion improving health outcomes. This social networking can assist with maternal and baby health care, senior's day groups where seniors are no longer able to be independently mobile. Indigenous health support systems utilise social networking with limited success due to the failure of the technology in remote and rural areas in the western parts of the Northern Rivers, However, high-speed connections could facilitate contact with extended family, offer counselling services via video etc.

How the National Broadband Network will support E-Health

E-Health strategies are based on universal availability of high-speed broadband to ensure all Australians have equal access to doctors, specialists and other health services. The full potential for how the NBN can improve health care and associated services is yet to be realised even though health care professionals are developing ways that can deliver better health care and associated services, in the Northern Rivers however with a growing aged population and an uncertain health workforce the E-Health solutions which rely on highspeed broadband will be essential. Tele-medicine, remote monitoring, and mobile devices for managing health care operations are critical to providing state-of-the-art cost-effective health care.

Improving Educational Resources and Training Available for Teachers and Students

With a disparate population spread throughout the Northern Rivers, access to educational opportunities in the more remote towns and villages are significantly impeded. These opportunities are impeded twofold:

- educational opportunities are unavailable (apart from small public primary schools); and
- internet connections and mobile phone coverage is often limited and unreliable.

As at 13 February 2011, the Northern Rivers had approximately 5450 apprentices and trainees in training:

- 2055 apprentices;
- 1548 existing workers in traineeships; and
- 1845 new entrant trainees (*NSW DET State Training Services 2011*).

For vocational education training, many employers choose an on-the-job form of apprenticeship so as to reduce the long distance travelling to educational facilities. With the advent of technologies which enable apprentices to wear headsets which transmit real-time video images while they undertake assessment tasks, assessors and apprentices no longer need to travel long distances for practical assessments. Hairdressing apprentices in Sydney currently have access to technology which allows the apprentice to wear the video headset and undertake a range of assessment tasks such as washing, cutting, colouring and perming in real time while the assessor is at the other end of the computer viewing exactly what the student is doing and can see. The assessor can speak with the student through an audio ear piece so that the student can then explain each of the steps so that not only practice but knowledge is assessed. This technology through high-speed broadband would revolutionise industry on-the-job assessment and support and be particularly valuable in a region where a lack of public transport can limit access to training.

Additionally, on-line learning can both support and assist isolated learners to maintain contact with other learners and have access to best practice training and information within their chosen career. These innovations require broadband technologies not currently available to those communities and learners.

Northern Rivers' registered training organisations have expended resources in developing on-line learning capacities for remote delivery to students in anticipation of high-speed broadband. Through which, Northern River's students will have opportunities to expand their learning through access to education and research material that can be transmitted in real time, the 'virtual classroom'. Whether it is online education, access to language courses or virtual tours of international museums, high-speed broadband will be a critical enabler of future technologies.

Students will benefit from new technologies and high speed broadband which will make interactive learning easier and faster, plus the ability to engage more personally with fellow students and the lecturers better and for those who move away from their family being able to keep an intimate relationship by sharing videos and high resolution photos. The Northern Rivers loses a great number of young people to larger urban centres due to perceived lack of comprehensive educational opportunities.

It will also assist in the delivery of life-long learning opportunities for adults and children in the Northern Rivers. Lifelong learning will become a reality to those who due to age, disability, lack of social amenity such as transport will be able to access education, an educator, engage with other learners from their homes in real time. This better connects people to their communities and ameliorates independence, self esteem whilst maintaining those populations within their communities.

Submission 055
Date received: 23/02/2011

Educational and instructional web-based, interactive design is a burgeoning industry in the Northern Rivers with local businesses developing on-line learning resources and courses for national and international markets in accredited and non-accredited training. Their capacity to date has been restricted in uploading to remote sites and providing the support required for their products.

It is envisaged that the NBN will deliver interactive online applications allowing groups in isolated locations to communicate in real time through an internet connection. There are sophisticated interactive software platforms that provide a virtual classroom for participants and learners. These technologies will give equity of access to education and training to this region which is currently not available and enable economic and employment growth in the on-line educational design and delivery sector.

Management of Australia's Built and Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability

The Northern Rivers is environmentally and culturally diverse. It has a rich indigenous cultural history and is recognised as one of the highest ranking in Australia in terms of biodiversity including many national parks and world heritage areas. It is one of Australia's fastest growing regions and predictions are that the high rate of population growth will continue. The region is home to over 292,000 people (June 2008) which is approximately 4% of the population of NSW. Our annual growth rate of 1.6% is higher than the state average %. This makes us the fastest growing area in NSW and population predictions (*Northern Rivers Regional Plan*) indicate that we will grow by approximately 37% by 2036.

Our natural amenity is a key attribute which accounts for the rate of in-migration. Professional workers also dubbed 'knowledge workers' and the 'creative classes' have a preference for 'lifestyle' regions/locations. (*Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan December 2009*). The Northern Rivers has attracted and continues to attract from these groups many of whom operate from a home base requiring access to high-speed broadband.

The management and maintenance of our natural amenity and environmental sustainability are a priority and the encouragement of home based businesses which rely on high speed broadband as opposed to travelling long distances by motor vehicle to an office base (there is no/little accessible, reliable public transport is available outside the school-bus runs) might ensure the sustainability of our environmental credentials. *Access Economics* reports that \$1.9billion per year could be saved in travel costs alone if workers could spend half their work hours at home with a high-speed broadband connection. The report suggests teleworking (using fixed and mobile broadband technologies to regularly work outside the confines of an office) will grow to new heights should the government deliver on its promise of building a nationwide fibre network capable of 100Mbps speeds. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 6 per cent of workers in Australia currently telework, however, that number is increasing in the Northern Rivers.

The Northern Rivers region has frequently been described as a region of villages and transport is consistently identified by employers, residents and agencies as one of our region's key challenges. As a result our residents are highly car dependent. Increasing the availability of work and income generation from home-based business and their utilisation of high speed broadband network will have a significant impact on our natural amenity and environmental sustainability. Telecommunications infrastructure is a form of transport, as it provides a means of access to goods and services. Adequate broadband capacity could help make up for the lack of public transport availability.

Included in the environmental cost benefits are:

- reduction of green house gases: the use of petrol (fossils fuels) and resultant pollution;
- infrastructure costs development of road systems and on-going maintenance reduction in impact on road usage and therefore reduction in road maintenance and repair required;
- reduction in not having to increase road and private transport infrastructure with a resultant impact on natural ecosystems;
- reduction in the development of more road systems and the resultant decrease in land acquisition from agricultural and other pursuits and reduction of invasive weeds; and
- reduction in requirements for public parking in Northern Rivers town centres and resultant reduction in green spaces in town centres

Businesses in the Northern Rivers that have a strong online presence are already becoming more competitive in a globally-connected world. In the future, travel to work and across the country for business, education, health care will be increasingly replaced by digital applications such as next generation, high definition videoconferencing and telepresence and other new services that require rapid transfer of data. This in turn will have a significant effect on our environmental sustainability.

Impacting Regional Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities

Regional Economic Growth

In the latest survey of business confidence Griffith University-Northern Star Business Confidence Index, conducted over the last three months to January 2011, Professor Michael Powell reports that the proposed NBN was strongly **supported by 84%** of businesses with **72% indicating that they would pay** for the service if it was available now. Prof Michael Powell said *“that business thought that the NBN would be a major benefit in their business with 28% unsure effect it would have.”*

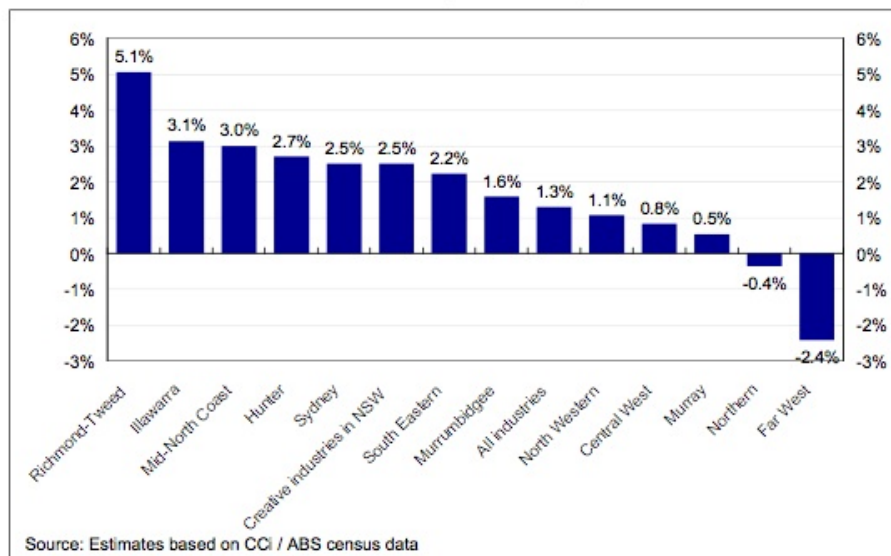
In a collaborative submission *The Benefits Of Early Adoption For The National Broadband Network Spanning Australia’s Eastern Regional Corridor* led by the Regional Futures Institute, Southern Cross University has identified similarities of all sea-change and tree change regions which need to preserve the unique features which attract inbound migration. The Northern Rivers attractions include healthy environment, excellent educational facilities, a creative and diverse culture, good health services and amenable and desirable climate. The submission notes that these attributes are consistent with the development of creative communities overseas and in Australia.

Our regional growth strategy is cognisant of the preservation and building on these attributes whilst encouraging and facilitating industry development which is consistent. RDA-Northern Rivers has commissioned an industry survey in four critical industries to determine the preparedness and uptake of high-speed, reliable broadband and to better understand the industry capacity and capabilities. The Creative Industries, Health and Aged Care, Education and Financial sectors are being targeted as these are strong growth sectors in the region that have potential to strengthen and grow using new technologies and ICT infrastructure. The Northern Rivers Region of NSW is a vibrant growth centre for arts and creative industries in Australia.

The Creative Industries - A Northern Rivers N.S.W perspective – Arts Northern Rivers

The region has the highest creative industry employment growth in NSW - more than double the growth rate of Sydney, and the highest “density” of creative workers per capita in the state outside Sydney.

Figure 5 – Creative industry employment: Total growth by NSW statistical divisions, 1996 to 2006 (best estimate)



Submission 055

Date received: 23/02/2011

Employment in the arts and creative industries in the region is growing at a rapid rate, and the Northern Rivers now has the highest concentration of visual artists outside the capital cities, and the largest cluster of screen industry workers outside Sydney and Melbourne.

The Northern Rivers Creative Industries Consortium

Creative Industries growth in the region has been driven by a unique suite of industry organisations with a track record of successful industry development initiatives. In 2006 these organizations came together with regional development and education agencies to form the Northern Rivers Creative Industries Consortium, with the specific goal of collaborating to support creative industry development.

The Northern Rivers Arts and Creative Industries Strategy 2009-12

In 2008 Arts Northern Rivers, working with the Consortium, engaged Positive Solutions Consultants, to develop the first comprehensive regional Arts and Creative Industries strategy in NSW - the *Northern Rivers Arts and Creative Industries Strategy (NRACIS)*.

The NRACIS provides a framework for stakeholders to work together to realise the potential of the creative industries in the region, for the economic benefits and job creation.

Current research, being conducted as a part of the NRACIS implementation, across the Music, Fashion and Screen / Digital sectors have all overwhelmingly identified the need for high speed broadband access to conduct their business and remain competitive in national and international markets.

The current gaps and weaknesses in highspeed broadband access have been identified as a major barrier to industry growth in the region.

Key recommendations in the strategy depend on high speed broadband access. These include

- collaborative creative industries marketing consortium and web portal
- creative brokers to facilitate linkage to national and international markets, particularly in the sectors of design/fashion, music and digital media/serious games
- creative industries incubators providing for high speed it, video conferencing etc
- creative industries education and training round table
- indigenous arts business centre (with online gallery and ecommerce)

High speed broadband access will enable creative enterprises and arts practitioners in the region to conduct their business in a national and international market, and to reach national and international audiences. It will enable the region to continue to develop as a regional creative industries hub by improving communications and content/product delivery, though improved video conferencing, web-streaming, e-commerce, online tendering and content delivery for screen industry producers.

At the moment many creative producers have to resort to archaic delivery systems, which make them less competitive, slower and limit their ability to secure national projects. For example the lack of high speed broadband in the region meant that the producers of the locally made TV drama series *East of Everything* (ABC Television 2008 and 2009) could not upload or edit rough cuts for each of the 13 episodes for approval by ABC TV executives in Sydney and Melbourne, and had to rely on sending a runner with a data drive to drive to the nearest airport at the end of each edit day, to catch flights to each city. This cost the production several days in turnaround time for each episode which ultimately cost the production budget. A production of this scale brings around \$5 million direct investment to the region and jobs for 660 local people. Similarly the animated children's series *DirtGirlWorld* (ABC, CBC) was created and produced locally, but the animation had to be done from capital cities in order to collaborate with international partners.

Technological development and broadband access is the driver behind the diminishing need to be permanently located in the capital cities. This represents a growing opportunity for the Northern Rivers

region to attract talent, and build critical mass for what is already recognised as an innovative community with diverse intellectual capital and a strong global focus.

The capacity of the region to capitalise on the strengths of its creative communities, and strong creative industries sector, is currently limited by broadband capacity.

The Arts

The Arts, as distinct from the Creative Industries, in the Northern Rivers Region has an important role in facilitating social cohesion and providing a forum and framework for the celebration and expression in individual and community identity and aspiration.

The provision of access to high speed broadband will enable a greater degree of engagement and connectivity across the region many people in regional areas are isolated and as a result not as aware of opportunities and information that is vital to their own, their families and their communities development, and their ability to participate and contribute is consequently affected.

With the emergent technologies and associated applications, the advent of social media as a tool for bridging isolation, sharing information, delivering life long learning programs and showcasing identity and expression, needs to be included into all development agenda across regional Australia.

Arts Northern Rivers, the Regional Arts Board supported by the seven local governments of the region and Arts NSW is establishing community building / engagement program areas focusing on:

- Art and Disability
- Art Health and Well being
- Art Environment and Sustainable Practice
- Art Education and Life long learning
- Custom, Culture and Cuisine

A feature of these program areas will be the utilisation of online networking, social media and virtual communication strategies. Of special note are the unique needs of people with a disability and aged people with limited mobility.

Labour Force and Employment Opportunities

The Northern Rivers has an employment participation rate of 52.4% (ABS2006) compared to NSW 58.9%. Unemployment in the Northern Rivers between December 2008 and March 2009 reached 8% whilst NSW generally was steady at 5.2% and the unemployment rate for Australia as a whole in March 2009 was 4.6%.

The rollout of the NBN is seen by many as an opportunity to train and gain employment for our local population. Broadband technologies use a combination of electrical and computer networking skills. A number of local registered training providers have positioned themselves to deliver training providing qualifications and skillsets appropriate for the installation of high speed broadband both on the street, dealing with NBN Co and retailers and within the premises, dealing directly with individual customers.

North Coast TAFE (NCT) has mapped skills and qualifications held by existing Electrical Contractors and Engineers and those held by current Information Technology graduates and identified potential pathways to assist these people to quickly achieve qualifications and skills thus offering better employment prospects.

NCT has identified a suitable course for delivery to HSC students under the vocational education in schools program (TVET) banner and teachers and will begin delivery to groups of young people in

Submission 055
Date received: 23/02/2011

2011. While this is a longer term strategy, we believe it is important as a way to build local young people's aspirations for these high skill occupations.

The cost effective installation of the network and the engagement of the regional communities and businesses in the installation of the NBN will bring benefits to employers, workers and learners. This opportunity will also assist in ensuring the viability of regional registered training organisations and maintain a strong regional education and vocational education industry responding to the needs of industry.

Facilitating community and social benefits

Highspeed broadband has innumerable benefits in connecting regional and rural communities and communities of interest throughout the world. For regional and rural centres typified by the Northern Rivers social networking will be hugely improved. The Northern Rivers represents isolated and small communities where activities to socialise and create recreational and business communities of interest are limited. High-speed broadband will offer more connectivity at a small community level where people are staying closer to their smaller communities rather than travelling to their urban/regional centres for work and recreation.

In the Northern Rivers smaller and remote communities may have access to on-line and real-time video sessions with counsellors, community and social support services, health providers such as early childhood nurses, mental health psychologists etc. Trials have been undertaken where social support services assist individuals with counselling by phone and/or video once per week with a range of mental health issues proving the efficacy of using high-speed broadband to affect changes in social and health outcomes for people requiring social, well-being and counselling support. The social benefit of people feeling connected to each other has significant social and health impacts.

From 2002-2003 the Community Technology Centres Program, under Networking the Nation Program facilitated the development of CTC centres in seven (7) Northern Rivers' communities: Bonalbo, Uki, Nimbin, Kyogle, Evans Head, Mullumbimby and Pottsville Many of these centres were developed to network communities where access to land and wireless was limited or not available at the time. The CTC centres with access to high-speed broadband will expand their services to provide these communities with options unavailable to them personally or privately due to social or financial disadvantage. These centres, many of which remain part of the CTC Association, have established a community expectation that a high-speed broadband has benefits for their communities, their businesses and their future.

References:

- a) National E-health Strategy Summary, delivered at Australian health Minister's Conference, Melbourne, December 2008,
- b) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Health Expenditure Data Cubes*, September 2008
- c) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Long term trends in health expenditure*, September 2008
- d) Northern NSW Health Network February 2011
- e) NSW Department of Education and Training – State Training Services.