



Mr Andrew McGowan
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Dear Mr McGowan,

NEW INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

On behalf of Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland & Torres Strait (RDA FNQ&TS) Committee, I write to you to express our support for the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN).

The RDA FNQ&TS region comprises 19 local government shires and regions which include Aurukun, Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Cook, Croydon, Etheridge, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Northern Peninsula Area, Pormpuraaw, Tablelands, Torres, Torres Strait Island, Weipa Town, Wujal Wujal and Yarrabah. The region covers a total area of 273,157.4 square kilometers or 15.8% of Queensland's total area. The region is home to 269,650 persons, with an expected population growth to 328,001 persons by year 2031.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Traditional Owners of the region across the Torres Strait, Cape, Gulf Savannah, Tropical Tablelands and South East areas. RDA FNQ&TS Committee acknowledges the Traditional Owners, the heritage they bring including that shared for all Australians, and benefits to be gained by all with Traditional Owners participating in decision-making. The Committee considers it particularly important that public entities, land management and culture related bodies, education institutions and tourism networks acknowledge the significance of Indigenous culture in Australia and the region.

The many rural and remote communities, geographical characteristics and climatic challenges of the FNQ&TS region present particular challenges for communications in business and community. For this region in particular, NBN offers a unique opportunity to directly address the significant tyranny of distance, which would overcome hardships and dysfunction in many areas of business, services and community.

The FNQ&TS region has the largest workforce in Tropical Australia, especially non-government workforce, and has a very strong private enterprise orientation that leads Tropical Australia by a long way in number of businesses. The region's base industry sectors (tourism, the primary industries and mining), earning income from outside the region, provide the foundations for the region's economy.



As identified in the RDA FNQ&TS Regional Road Map, the regional vision is to be: **The world's leading sustainable tropical region**. Our Road Map clearly articulates the Top 6 Regional Priorities (as listed below) and our Committee has partnered with a broad level of stakeholders to set meaningful goals and develop key strategic actions to enable realization of our regional vision. We seek to partner with all levels of government and our community to negotiate pathways to achievement.

1. **Economic Vitality**
2. **World Class Sustainable Natural and Cultural Resource Management**
3. **Visionary and Enabling Built Infrastructure**
4. **Inclusive Planning and Delivery of Community Services**
5. **Empowered People Through Knowledge and Skills**
6. **Reconceptualised Regionalism**

Furthermore, our Regional Road Map identifies an effective regional digital and telecommunications network to link communities and to drive commercial and service delivery reforms, as a top priority for the region. This is in direct response to the identification of limited access to reliable and consistent high-speed internet access and mobile phone service network, as a critical current cross-linking constraint for the region's economy and community. The National Broadband Network is a key priority for RDA FNQ&TS as it would better enable connectivity within our region and take us closer to achieving equity and long term sustainability throughout our vast and dynamic communities. This could be achieved on many fronts and for both social and economic pursuits.

Please find following our response to the areas of interest listed in the Inquiry:

1. Delivery of government services and programs

Access to on-line delivery of government services and programs holds huge potential opportunity to improve equal access to services and for interactive services in our communities. Additionally, this presents an opportunity to government to achieve technology and cost efficiencies. Day-to-day local council services, libraries and disaster management are among the many essential services which will be greatly enhanced through the NBN. In emphasising this issue, we would highlight the following points:

- The importance of equal access and pricing arrangements for services between CBD, metro, rural and regional areas;
- The importance of early indication of infrastructure roll-out and information on the access regime to enable our region to plan effectively to build capacity to utilise high speed broadband;

2. Achieving health outcomes

Access to e-Health programs offers an enormous opportunity for improved health provision throughout our communities. From state and private hospitals, the Division of General Practice and allied health, demand for secure bandwidth exceeds supply. The installation of ubiquitous high-speed broadband over fibre and wireless is critical to enable modern standards of health care to be fully provided throughout our community.

At present we are limited in our capacity to deliver applications and services from Cairns Base Hospital to satellite facilities due to our limited WAN links. Having the NBN available will mean that we will be able to broaden the delivery of these systems and services to provide a better and more efficient Health care"

3. Improving the educational resources and training available to teachers and student

NBN is critical to support full and equal access to computer based technologies, online education services, programs and research capability, irrespective of the remoteness or scale of the community or education establishment. From primary school to University, NBN and E-Learning resources will support the current needs and future viability of our communities. In a global context of e-learning the opportunity lost through lack of equitable access to these technologies throughout the education system would be huge for the FNQ&TS communities.

The James Cook University submission to this Inquiry further details exciting new developments in areas such as achieving health outcomes, improving the educational resources and training available for teachers and students, the management of Australia's built and natural resources and environmental sustainability, and impacts on regional economic growth and employment opportunities. These outcomes are of particular significance to RDA FNQ&TS and requires a coverage and accessibility that matches JCU's regional footprint in northern Queensland. Without access to the NBN, the development of next generation teaching tools and environments cannot flourish.

4. Management of built and natural resources and environmental sustainability

The FNQ&TS region as a whole offers an exceptionally attractive and appealing natural environment. One of Australia's major natural "World Heritage" areas is located in the FNQ&TS region (eg Great Barrier Reef and Rainforests) and much of the rest of the region has international biodiversity and cultural values. Our communities agree on the importance and significance of protecting and preserving our pristine environment and seek to address the the significant issues we face now or are likely to be susceptible to in the future, including:

- the risks of climate change (Cairns is among the five most vulnerable Australian cities);
- loss of bio-diversity and eco-system service that significantly affect the region's key natural assets which support the significant Tourism Industry.

The NBN in this region will support the management of our built and natural resources in a vast range of ways. These are well documented and well researched but in a region characterised by dispersed and remote communities and a pristine natural environment, the support that NBN will give to this management is particularly significant - from improved research, environmental monitoring and information distribution capability, increased field research and data collection capacity, application of new technologies to rural farming, eco-tourism and interpretation and through very important support for high levels of home-based business operations and reduced need for travel.

5. Regional Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities, Business Efficiencies and Revenues

This region is currently at economic disadvantage in national and international terms by not having NBN, or open and equitable access to high-speed, business grade broadband. Investment attraction; business competitiveness; business capability; small business; home-based business; training; on-line services; business support and data back-up; and specific industry sector growth are all dependent on highly competitive and high quality broadband services. The geography and climate of this region exacerbates this disadvantage. Within this need key issues for the region include urgent need to access ubiquitous world-class broadband infrastructure and competitive pricing.

Building business capacity and capability is key to the effectiveness of the NBN to support economic development and employment opportunities. As a region, the FNQ&TS is committed to supporting the implementation of NBN

through regional economic development strategies to build this capability and capacity to take full advantage of the NBN.

6. Interaction with Research and Development and Related Innovation Investment

The FNQ&TS region is focused on growing its research capacity, through the James Cook University in particular. World leading tropical expertise is a key strength and opportunity for this region, ranging from health and tropical disease, to marine sciences, research and filming, design and construction. It is also a region which is growing in reputation and focus for innovation, positioning itself within the Regional Economic Development Plan as the international leader in tropical innovation. NBN will directly enable and support the growth of this regions (and Australia's) capacity and capability to compete at an international level in the fields of tropical research and innovation.

7. Facilitating Social and Community Benefit

NBN provides a unique opportunity for our region to achieve and benefit from social enterprise and cohesion and connectedness within our communities. It is a priority for RDA FNQ&TS, to facilitate the development of a well structured and collaborative strategy to support capacity building and innovation in our region, which will benefit our natural environmental and contribute to economy and which reinvests back into the social sector and community. The benefits back into the region would be significant in terms of youth engagement, labour market participation, bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, social inclusion for all Australians disadvantaged or not.

8. Optimal Capacity and Technological Requirements of a Network to Deliver these Outcomes

The fundamental requirement of the NBN for FNQ&TS is high-speed, business grade, cost competitive, and ubiquitous broadband delivered consistent across the region.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that the FNQ&TS region is characterised by high levels of collaboration and partnership. The social and community benefits which the NBN will afford to this region, are not underestimated. The region also fully recognises that while NBN will provide the infrastructure and opportunity for this region, it is the region itself which must capitalise on that opportunity and take full advantage on the benefits it will provide for regional development, prosperity and competitiveness at an international level.

The RDA FNQ&TS is committed to supporting the capability and capacity within the region to take full advantage of the NBN. This will be leveraged with our nearest southern neighbours, the RDA Townsville & North West Region. The cross-linkage opportunities are numerous, particularly in relation to a consistent service delivery of education and research through our shared James Cook University.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you seek any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Dale
Acting Chair (Interim)

