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AUSTRALIAN
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
USERS GROUP
LIMITED

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Secretary
House Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra
1 March 2011

Dear Secretary

Before outlining ATUG's views on the Inquiry, I would like to outline ATUG's background in the sector and the reason for our continued long-term interest in broadband policy and outcomes in Australia.

Background

ATUG is a member-funded, not for profit organisation that has been working for 30 years to ensure that the views of end users are key to communications sector policy makers, regulators and industry.

ATUG's focus has always been on the availability and affordability of up to date communications services for all Australians throughout the country. Our policy preference is competition, with Government intervention where markets fail, and clear consumer protection policies.

Our work on broadband began over 15 years ago with the Broadband Services Experts Group and continued with the 2002 Broadband Advisory Group and every Senate and House Committee of Inquiry and all other consultations into broadband services, policies and programs in Australia.

ATUG has represented the voice of the end users in every one of the many consultation processes since 2007 that have led to the development of Australia's National Broadband Policy Framework and the establishment of NBN Co. We have most recently made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the NBN Companies Bill and the NBN Co Access Bill.

National Broadband Network

ATUG supports the NBN Policy because it delivers the following outcomes:

- A national fibre based communications network
- Much better outcomes for remote and rural users

- Stronger competition among retailers

The important outcomes for end users will be:

- Convenience and effectiveness
- New communications tools and services
- Efficiency and productivity

Shifting to a Digital Economy

The policy to build the national Broadband network needs to be supported with other policies and programs to ensure benefits are achieved in all sectors in the economy and for individuals.

ATUG makes a number of suggestions below.

ATUG Activities relevant to the Committee

ATUG has held three series of discussions with our members and other stakeholders that we feel are of relevance to this Committee:

- ATUG Regional Roadshow series 2003-2010
- ATUG Digital Economy Future Forums 2007 - 2009
- ATUG Digital Economy Focus Forums 2010
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We have attached reports of these discussions for the Committee.

We have also supported the following work, which is of relevance to the next phase of broadband development in Australia:

- Digital Literacy Skills for workplaces
- Tele-working Taskforce 2006
- Not for Profit sector strategies

Outcomes

ATUG would like to continue our work with Regional Communities to explain NBN and other Communications Policies in an independent way and to explore with communities the benefits of advanced broadband services through demonstrations and case studies relevant to regional communities.

ATUG would like to see further advances the work commissioned by the Innovations Business Skills Australian Council on Digital Literacy Skills for workplaces.

ATUG would like to see National Guidelines for Tele-working Arrangements which would include all OHS issues, management and staff policy development and which could encourage organisations to try this new way of working.

ATUG would like to see specific support for the Not for Profit sector to encourage take-up and use of NBN grade services and devices. The role of the NFP sector in the economy will only increase, and government needs to support the transition to more productive and effective ways of delivering community support.

ATUG would like to see NBN Co more directly engaged with end users once the NBN Companies and NBN Co Access legislation is passed. From an end users perspective direct engagement with NBN Co will allow better understanding of the policies and possibilities of the National Broadband Network. The role for Retailers will begin when NBN services are available and Telstra migration processes are completed. In some cases this will not be until 2021, but end users will be interested in NBN developments during the whole period from now until the project is complete.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Sinclair
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Australian Telecommunications Users Group (ATUG)
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