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DESTINATION TWEED INC

16 February 2010

Standing Committee in Infrastructure and Communications
Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives
PO Box 6023
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: NEW INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

Broadband telecommunications, in its various forms is now recognised as the roads and railways of the 21st century that will generate the next wave of economic expansion. Just as transport opened up new economic horizons in the last century, advanced telecommunication networks will pave the way to open up new markets across the country and around the world, as well as achieving significant productivity gains for industry.

Destination Tweed welcomes the new inquiry into the National Broadband Network (NBN) investigating the public benefit to cost effective, maximum coverage, high speed telecommunications infrastructure through a combination of fibre, wireless and satellite services. Destination Tweed supports the continued rollout and development of the NBN initiative as a significant step in future proofing the nation. Destination Tweed considers the area of telecommunications infrastructure to be a critical element in the development and commercial sustainability of business generally and specifically in health, education, regional economic growth and business productivity for small to medium enterprise.

ABOUT DESTINATION TWEED (FORMALLY TWEED TOURISM)

The role of Destination Tweed is to facilitate positive momentum for business and tourism, principally at a local and regional level. Destination Tweed commenced a contract with Tweed Shire Council on October 1st, 2010 to include the promotion of business investment.

Previously known as Tweed Tourism since 1994, when the organisation was first established by Tweed Shire Council as an independent tourism management organisation. Since 2005 Tweed Tourism reviewed its strategic direction to include investigation of a wide range of opportunities for tourism product development enhancement based on the natural attributes and conservation values of the region.

Destination Tweed is governed by an independent Board of eight (8) directors of diverse private and public sector backgrounds, qualifications and experience.

Destination Tweed aligns with key national, state and local tourism bodies, neighboring councils, Chambers of Commerce and a tourism/business membership base to promote the region as a leisure and business destination.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In response to the terms of reference for this inquiry, Destination Tweed has provided responses addressed below.

b) Achieving Health Outcomes

eHealth will streamline secure delivery of healthcare information and strip away repetitious and inefficient processes in a region that is one of the fastest population growth regions in the aging demographic in the east coast of Australia. The aging population is an area that affordable high speed broadband can transform a potential problem to an opportunity through the provision of eHealth services. eHealth has proven internationally to be a major beneficiary of broadband, as a result of an array of products and services enabling the aged infirm to remain at home much longer and with substantially improved quality of life. This will become a critical issue given that in 10 years the citizens in the Tweed that are over 65 years are expected to number around 40,000.

Currently the Tweed is serviced by the Tweed Hospital a 220 bed public facility with 24 hour emergency services. The Tweed Hospital provides clinical teaching and experience for medical, nursing, allied health and pharmacy students from Bond and Griffith Universities. The Murwillumbah District Hospital servicing the lower end of the shire is a 95 bed acute general hospital providing a broad range of health services to the people of Murwillumbah and surrounding communities in the Tweed Valley and southern Gold Coast.

Major government agencies and institutions such as Tweed and Murwillumbah Hospital, NSW Ambulance and Police are restricted in their service delivery and electronic transactions by a 2 megabyte (Mb) copper cable bandwidth capacity.

Furthermore, the unavailability of adequate telecommunications infrastructure in the Tweed Shire's rural locality of Pottsville has resulted in a major aged and community care service provider (Feros Care) to relocate its facilities and staff across the border to Coolangatta in South East Queensland.

c) Improving the education resources and training available for teachers and students

eEducation in regional Australia will provide a wider delivery of distance education with students having choice in blended online/classroom education. In the case of tertiary institutions, the use of telecommunication as modes of education resources and communication are critical to ensure up-to-date information is transmitted as well as encouraging global links and international competitiveness.

Currently in the Tweed there are 38 primary schools, 11 high schools and in excess of 700 students enrolled at the Southern Cross University (Tweed Campus) and 6000 students enrolled at the North Coast Institute of TAFE (Kingscliff & Murwillumbah).

e) Impacting regional economic growth and employment opportunities

The regional economies of the Tweed and SE Qld are intricately linked and with the opening of the Tugan bypass approx 44,000 vehicles cross the NSW/QLD border daily and that this figure is expected to reach 151,000 by 2026. Journey to Work figures confirm that Tweed Shire has a total working population of 25,562 people of which 11,469 leave the Shire each day with 6,576 traveling each day to work in SEQ and the Gold Coast.

Unfortunately, the lack of modern and reliable telecommunications infrastructure (particularly high speed broadband and mobile services), in Murwillumbah and the rural areas of the Tweed has had a negative impact on potential new business investment and investors seeking to establish or relocate to the region. New economic generating businesses and employment opportunities have been lost as a result.

The NBN will provide opportunities in the Tweeds employment generating lands at Murwillumbah and Chinderah to broaden and diversify the Tweed economy, and assist in regional economic sustainability into the future.

The NBN will be utilised by the new Industry Central Enterprise Park in Murwillumbah which is only fibre enabled. The Industry Central Enterprise Park is estimated to accommodate 800-2000 jobs with high speed telecommunications expected to further entice investors to the new premises.

In addition, the Tweed hosts 40ha of industrial zoned land at Chinderah which is catered to by all services but high speed broadband telecommunications with the implementation of this infrastructure improving the area's bid for the potential 2000 jobs it may generate. The Tweed Shire Council has identified this area as a key growth area with the 86ha Greenfield site west of Pottsville possibly adding an additional 3500 jobs to the area.

f) Impacting business efficiencies and revenues particularly for small & medium business

The most recent Australian Business Register data indicates that there is an estimated 28,645 business entities operating in the Tweed with sole traders making up 36% of total businesses. The growth potential for small and medium enterprise and the home based businesses sector cannot be under estimated with access to the NBN.

The NBN will also see the optic fibre network capturing the major business centres of Tweed Heads, Kingscliff and Murwillumbah which will significantly enhance service delivery and efficiencies, facilitate opportunities for growth and further investment.

CONCLUSION

Broadband telecommunications in its various forms is now recognised as the roads and railways of the 21st century that will generate the next wave of economic expansion. Not only does its future availability have positive implications for business investment, which will assist in growing and diversifying the economic base of the regional economy, but of equal significance and importance, are the benefits to be had in managing the education and health issues associated with the extremely high and growing ageing Tweed population demographic.

The announcement of a new inquiry into the NBN by the Federal Government will provide the platform to debate the public benefit to high speed broadband across Australia. Destination Tweed is committed to the support of the delivery of this vital infrastructure in an effort to secure economic growth and enhancement of community life by allowing access to a wider range of information and services delivered with unprecedented convenience and flexibility. We look forward to the positive outcome of this inquiry,

Yours faithfully,

Tracy Armstrong
Product & Economic Development Coordinator