

Eastern Regional Libraries

Submission 221
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Mr Andrew McGowan
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600

INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on behalf of the Eastern Regional Libraries Corporation (ERLC) in relation to the role and potential of the National Broadband Network.

Background

ERLC is the largest public library service in Victoria with thirteen branches and three mobile libraries.

ERLC provides library services to Knox City Council, Maroondah City Council and Yarra Ranges Council. Together the three municipalities cover a large geographic area of 2,675 sq kilometres in the outer metropolitan area of Melbourne. There is a diverse range of communities with a combined population of 405,000 people.

Further information about our Member Councils' demographics and social profile is detailed at Appendix 1.

Regional Demographics and Social Environment

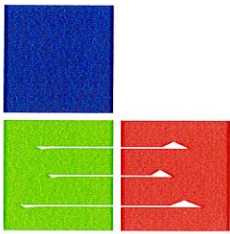
The area covered by ERLC consists of a very mobile population used to travelling and commuting. Many people in this region currently spend considerable amounts of time travelling to meetings, providing business services, attending classes and socialising.

Poor public transport options in the ERLC region (particularly in Yarra Ranges) exacerbate the challenges for our communities. Unfortunately, this creates a car-dependant community with the ensuing impact on the environment.

ABS Statistics indicate that our population aged between 55 and 69 will continue to increase. This group is often retired with time available to spend reading and using libraries.

Families with young children also make up a large section of the population served by ERLC. ABS statistics also show that over 25% of the population is under 19 years, so ERLC has a strong commitment to cater for the needs of this demographic group. ERLC is very aware of its role in promoting high literacy levels within the community.

As a society we are increasingly "time poor". This has an impact on library use as people have less free time to physically access libraries. People are looking more and more for downloadable materials that are readily accessible from home and work.



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General Commentary

The NBN would enhance ERLC's capacity to deliver services and programs to our community by improving our own connectivity between our 13 branches and 3 mobile libraries.

ERLC currently provides 230,000 public internet access hours per annum and since introducing WiFi is now providing almost 25,000 sessions per annum. These are extremely important cost free services for people who do not have access (or limited access) to the authoritative databases, internet and software programs (such as Word, Excel, etc) that can assist with study, training, job applications, etc.

It would allow also more of our communities to access our online 24/7 services through improved internet access. ERLC has over 780,000 visits per annum to its website (www.yourlibrary.com.au) by people wanting access to all kinds of information, including authoritative databases and our catalogue where they can reserve any item in the collection. The rollout of NBN to all our communities would undoubtedly lead to further growth in our 24/7 services.

Mobile and wireless connectivity would also widen and improve our service delivery to our community from our mobile libraries.

NBN will reinforce ERLC's use of technologies and support its own rollout in downloadable materials (e books, music and video) and in the social networking arena through Facebook and Twitter.

Overall, the provision of a high speed, cost competitive network will enable our residents: to work potentially from home; deliver services remotely; meet on-line; access better information from all levels of government on ageing, health and other matters; undertake on-line education; enjoy social networking; further participate in democratic processes; and download materials that are readily accessible from home and work.

Specific Commentary

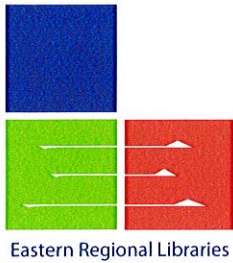
To Opt-In, or To Opt-Out! That is the question

In the case of NBN it's not just a question, it is a very important policy decision required of the Federal Government.

In First Release Sites, NBN Co is seeking consent to connect to premises. This is known as an "Opt-In" process. NBN Co admits that an "Opt-Out" process would facilitate the rollout, but that this is ultimately a policy decision.

ERLC believes that an Opt-Out position is a much better policy. An Opt-Out policy at least ensures that every property owner has to consider and respond to whether or not they wish to be connected to the network.

This could be extremely important in areas, for example, where there are non-English speaking populations or large numbers of rental properties.



Implementation

Consideration should be given to the simultaneous rollout of Fixed Wireless, Satellite Services and direct Optic Fibre. Non-simultaneous rollout will leave many in our remoter communities at considerable social and economic disadvantage.

Price

It is noted that NBN Co's wholesale access price is \$24 per month is the same for direct Optic Fibre services, Fixed Wireless and Satellite Services (NBN Co Corporate Plan, Dec 2010).

However, there may be considerable difference in retail pricing for those accessing Fixed Wireless and Satellite Services. Our remoter communities should not be at a retail price disadvantage when compared to those accessing direct Optic Fibre services.

Access

To ensure the benefits of the NBN for all our communities it is suggested that all public library services be placed on "Opt- Out" rather than "Opt-In" for optic fibre services where feasible.

This is particularly important:

- in areas where Fixed Wireless and Satellite services are the only (and potentially expensive) option ;
- because Optic Fibre services will have a committed speed of 100 Megabits per second up to a Gigabit per second in contrast to Fixed Wireless and Satellite services which will have peak streaming rates of 12 Mbps Downstream and 1 Mbps Upstream; and/or
- where library services provide important cost free services for people who do not have access (or limited access) to the authoritative databases, internet and software programs (such as Word, Excel, etc) that can assist with study, training, job applications, etc.

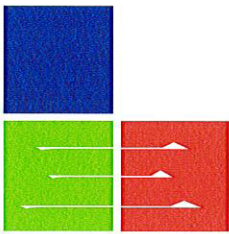
Without full fibre optic access at public library branches many individuals and business will not be able to avail themselves of, or afford, the higher level services and benefits to be delivered by the NBN.

Irrespective of any government decision in relation to this policy for all premises (see earlier discussion) ERLC believes that this is a way of ensuring that a vital service is delivered to all our communities.

If the "Opt-Out" policy is not adopted by the Federal Government, then it is strongly recommended that the representative body for public libraries in each State and territory be asked for a contact list for all public library service providers. This is extremely important in the case of regional library services which may be overlooked in any discussions with individual municipalities.

In Victoria the representative body is:

Public Libraries Victoria Network
Level 12/60 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
(p) 03 9667 5542



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Summary

ERLC believes that the Federal Government needs to review its "Opt-In" policy and change it to "Opt-Out" for all premises. An Opt-Out policy at least ensures that every premises owner has to consider and respond to whether or not they wish to be connected to the network.

Consideration should be given to the simultaneous rollout of Fixed Wireless, Satellite Services and direct Optic Fibre. Non-simultaneous rollout will leave many in our remoter communities at considerable social and economic disadvantage.

Our remoter communities should not be placed at a retail price disadvantage when compared to those accessing direct Optic Fibre services.

To ensure the benefits of the NBN for all our communities it is suggested that all public library services be placed on "Opt- Out" rather than "Opt-In." This is irrespective of any government decision in relation to this policy for all premises. Without full fibre optic access at public library branches many individuals and business will not be able to avail themselves of the higher level services and benefits to be delivered by the NBN.

The Federal Government can show its commitment to ubiquitous 24/7 access to services, information, social networking, training, education, job seeking, etc for all communities by placing all library services on an "Opt-Out" footing.

If you have any questions I can be contacted at

Yours sincerely

Joseph Cullen
Chief Executive

29 March 2011

Knox

Knox is an established municipality combining residential, industrial and commercial areas. There are 58,000 homes and 14,000 businesses in Knox, including 5,000 homebased businesses. Major features of the municipality include major shopping areas at Knox Central Activity Centre in Wantirna South, Bayswater, Boronia, Ferntree Gully, Mountain Gate, Scoresby Village, and Stud Park in Rowville, with Knox City Shopping Centre providing a focal point for the city.

The city is well served with recreational facilities including Koomba Park in Wantirna, Lewis Park in Wantirna South, Chesterfield Farm in Scoresby, the Corhanwarrabul and Monbulk Creek parklands and Lysterfield Park.

Overall, 25.4% of the population is aged between 0 and 17, and 14.8% are aged 60 years and over, compared with 22.9% and 17.0% respectively for the Melbourne Statistical Division.

Maroondah

The City of Maroondah features a balanced blend of more established residential areas along the major transport routes and railway lines, newer residential pockets in the northern and south-eastern peripheries, light industrial precincts concentrated within the south-eastern corner, service and retail precincts clustered along the Maroondah Highway corridor, and a spread of parklands and recreational reserves.

The area's major activity centres are Ringwood and Croydon and future residential growth will be focused around these centres. With little remaining significant tracts of land for large-scale residential developments, population growth has slowed in Maroondah over recent years and future growth will be stimulated by housing consolidation and medium density developments.

Overall, Maroondah has an ageing population. The median age of residents is 37 years and one quarter of the population is aged 55 years and over.

Yarra Ranges

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is located on metropolitan Melbourne's eastern fringe. The Shire balances a mix of urban and rural communities. Around 70% of the Shire's population lives in the 'urban' areas of the municipality that represent approximately 3% of its landmass. The rest of the population is distributed throughout the remaining area. There are over 55 suburbs, townships, small communities and rural areas within the Shire, making it one of the most diverse of any municipality in the State. Yarra Ranges has a diverse economy of around 10,000 businesses, employing some 35,289 people.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges has long been recognized as a special place for its natural beauty and diverse habitats. The combination of national parks, state forests, private gardens and its location on the doorstep of Melbourne all combine to make the area unique in its natural, cultural and amenity values.

Yarra Ranges can be characterized as a 'young' Shire, with a higher than average proportion of the population aged between 5 and 17 years and more family households than typical across Melbourne. The median age of Shire residents is 36.6 years.