



## Chair's Foreword

This is the fourth review report of the Joint Committee of the National Broadband Network and has proved to be the most difficult of all four. Even though we have successfully come inside the Terms of Reference reporting date by 24 hours, it has been several months of disagreement between committee members on some very basic points in this report that have seen the report delivered later than planned.

This is disappointing. The tradition of committee membership in Australian political culture is that adversarial politics is left at the door. It is a concern to many that this culture is showing signs of changing on this Committee, where sensitivities of our oversight work as compared to political party election platforms has made the work of the committee much more difficult than it need be. In my view, this is an early warning sign that the topic of higher speed broadband technology is likely to feature strongly in political debate throughout 2013, an election year.

I want to pay a very special tribute to the staff of the Secretariat of the JCNBN. At times, they were unfairly caught in the middle of party politics. They managed this with great skill and dexterity, and the fact a report of any kind has been able to be produced, is a direct credit to these individuals. Through this period, we lost Peter Stephens to a different role in the Parliament. I particularly thank Peter for his work, and his subtle skills in managing a highly charged political committee reflects very well on his knowledge of the APS and Parliamentary culture and practice.

This year, there is one more report due in July/August, as a fifth and final report of the NBN oversight committee. Between now and then, public hearings involving the NBN Co CEO and the Department will be held. Personally, I am concerned about setting the Secretariat up to fail in trying to get a committee report produced several months before an election. Therefore, I do flag we may not be able to reach agreement and may not produce a fifth report at all.

I am not confident that the focus of the committee is an oversight of an existing build under the existing Shareholder Ministers arrangements. Instead, I think the

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committee has become somewhat stuck on a policy dispute between different build options, and will only deepen divisions on this in the pre-election period.

If we can manage to produce a 5<sup>th</sup> report, there is a danger it won't mean much from an oversight perspective. Despite the opportunities to report and provide oversight on a number of important aspects of the current roll-out, there is every chance the next report will be nothing more than a compendium of political statements and election promises. If this is all we can produce, I could write it now, and it makes the entire committee process worthless and a waste of time for all involved.

I therefore hope I am wrong, and in a way challenge the committee members to revel in proving me wrong, in a hope that the work of an important committee of 16 MP's and Senators, with 68 participating MP's and Senators, does actually have some worth in advancing policy for Australia over the coming six month period. Somewhat naively, I live in hope!

Enjoy this fourth report, and the additional comments. It has, for many, been many hours of hard work.

Robert Oakeshott MP  
Chair