

The Secretary  
Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network  
Department of the House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600.

March 28 2012

Dear Secretary,

**Re: Submission to the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network**

Please find below a submission, as per the Terms of Reference, on behalf of Regional Development Australia Northern Inland:

1. *The rollout of the NBN, including in relation to the Government's objective for NBN Co. Limited:*
  - a) *connect 93 per cent of Australian homes, schools and businesses with fibre-to-the premises technology providing broadband speeds of up to 100 megabits per second, with a minimum fibre coverage obligation of 90 per cent of Australian premises; and*
  - b) *service all remaining premises by a combination of next-generation fixed wireless and satellite technologies providing peak speeds of at least 12 megabits per second;*

**Response:**

- There is a strong need to establish local Digital Economy Groups, possible headed by RDAs. These are critical to build both the number of connections and maximise the utilisation and productivity gains that will be delivered by the NBN.
- RDAs have strong relationships and lines of communication to all levels of Government – Federal, State and Local and would be ideally suited to carry out this role. With only 55 RDAs nationally it would be far less complex than engaging individually with Local Councils
- Digital Economy Groups will need to involve
  - Digital Hub and Digital Enterprise Programs
  - Education and Research Groups such as Universities, CSIRO, ACBI and NICTA
  - Relevant State & Territory Government Departments
  - NBN Co
  - Local Councils
  - Local health representatives



- Why the lower 90% 'minimum coverage obligation' for the rollout of fibre? 93% is the figure routinely used in the public arena.
  - Some communities, for example Bendemeer and Bundarra in Northern Inland NSW are below the population threshold to receive fibre coverage and will only be offered an NBN Wireless service. These communities already have ADSL 2+ and a conversion to an NBN wireless service may potentially be to their detriment. Maybe it would be better for towns that currently have ADSL or ADSL2+ that are below the minimum population threshold be NBN fibred in lieu of a wireless service.
  - Earlier and more frequent community information sessions are required for MDUs (Multi Dwelling Units) and in relation to the proposed fibre footprint. Local residents and particularly businesses need input into this process. We have a situation in Armidale where a key industrial area, the airport and a future industrial estate have been left off the plans.
  - Earlier and more visual community information sessions on the location and establishment of NBN Wireless tower sites are essential. These are the main source of controversy.
2. *The achievement of take-up targets (including premises passed and covered and services activated) as set out in NBN Co.'s Corporate Plan released on 20 December 2010 as revised from time to time;*

**Response:**

- RSPs need to get their pricing plans out earlier and be a lot more proactive. As an example, Telstra have only just released their fibre pricing plans in the past month and they still don't have pricing plans for Wireless, despite it going operational in April 2012.
3. *Network rollout performance including service levels and faults;*

**Response:**

- NBN Co need to ensure there is an end-end QOS (Quality of Service) which includes RSPs (Retail Service Providers). Perhaps a similar Web Page to "My School" which aggregates RSPs performance levels to help customers make a decision on the most appropriate provider for their area.
4. *The effectiveness of NBN Co. in meeting its obligations as set out in its Stakeholder Charter;*

**Response:**

- NBN Co has a very active and professional Community Relations team that readily engage with communities in the rollout footprints.
  - Perhaps more focus could be placed on targeted communications to residents in rollout areas advising them when the NBN will arrive and how it will benefit them. A factsheet of sorts.
5. *NBN Co.'s strategy for engaging with consumers and handling complaints;*

**Response:**

- As per previous comments, the establishment of Digital Economy Groups at a local level under the auspice of RDAs is critical.
- Earlier engagement with communities is also required, especially in relation to extension of fibre and wireless footprints.

6. *NBN Co.'s risk management processes; and*

**Response: None**

7. Any other matter pertaining to the NBN rollout that the Committee considers relevant.

**Response:**

- There have been over 300 telehealth trials over the past 5 years and it is time we moved on to implementing the following three programs in tandem with the rollout of the NBN:
  - PCEHR (Personally Controlled e-Health Records)
  - Remote Patient Care
  - Local Medicare Groups
  - Assisted Living technology
- There should also be a move towards a High-Definition Video Conferencing National Dial System which would enable all Government Departments to Video Conference with each other seamlessly. I.e. Federal, State and Local – Education, Health and Social Security. Again this should be rolled out in conjunction with NBN
- In conclusion, the NBN is a real game changer for Regional Australia and the sooner it is rolled out the better. Now that that rollout is well underway, it is also equally important we physically begin building the Digital Economy from the ground up, so we can maximise benefits to people in the areas of Education, Health Commerce, Social Inclusion, the delivery of Government services and Agriculture.

I would be happy to appear before a public enquiry or provide any further information.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Axelsson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nathan Axelsson  
Executive Officer