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The Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the National Broadband Network
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network

The attached comments have been provided in response to the invitation to express the views of Ballarat ICT Limited on the Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network

Yours Faithfully,

Ian Fry

Ian Fry
Executive Officer
Ballarat ICT Limited

RE : SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK

Ballarat ICT Limited supports the provision and the continuation of the National Broadband Network, (NBN), throughout regional Australia given the significant effect it will have on the economy growth and the future wellbeing of all of Australia.

Strategically located in the Central Highlands region of Victoria, Ballarat is approximately 110km north-west of Melbourne, the State capital. Ballarat is one of Australia's fastest growing inland cities with a projected population of 128,190 by 2026. Ballarat is also the gateway to western Victoria and provides many services, connections and economic drivers to support a region of approximately 400,000 people.

Ballarat has traditionally been a city that prospered on mineral and agricultural based resources, however this has changed. Health and community services, education, information communications technology (ICT), manufacturing, tourism and retailing are now the key industries in the city. These industries, along with the banking and finance sector and government services are strengthening Ballarat's role as a regional service hub.

Ballarat continues to positively contribute to Victoria's strong growth in the ICT industry. The information technology sector is emerging as a significant industry within the region. Strategic partnerships with the locally growing ICT sector and tertiary institutions are adding to Ballarat's increasing importance as a knowledge centre within Victoria.

The ICT industry in Ballarat boasts employees from Telstra, iiNet IBM, and a variety of State Government agencies who have regional operations focused on delivering services across the state and internationally from Ballarat. Ballarat also enjoys a competitive infrastructure delivering broadband speeds up to 100mbps this combined with Ballarat being one of the early sites for NBN fibre and fixed wireless deployment. Having this level of infrastructure availability places Ballarat in a unique position to provide commentary on the benefits of the delivery of highspeed broadband services to businesses, government agencies and the community.

The 2001 Census indicated that the Ballarat region employed 489 people in ICT occupations this represented 1.49 percent of the City's labour force. According to City of Ballarat data, this figure had increased to 630 and 1.9 percent of the labour force by 2006. These levels of ICT employment indicate that the Ballarat region has strong claims to being Victoria's leading regional centre for ICT.

Ballarat now has the highest proportion of ICT employees in regional Victoria and the third largest in regional Australia. This highly educated and skilled workforce has been a major factor in establishing Ballarat as a nationally and globally competitive ICT centre.

Ballarat ICT employment levels are expected to grow to in excess of 2000 employees by 2030. The City of Ballarat and Ballarat ICT recognise the significance and potential impact that the National Broadband Network (NBN) will have on Ballarat and the surrounding regions both in terms of the equity of access that it will provide as well as access to new generation broadband infrastructure and a range of new and innovative services and facilities.

The NBN is crucial to level the playing field for existing businesses that are currently badly serviced in regional areas by making them more competitive with their capital city counter parts. This will result in widening their potential customer base and in some cases opportunities for export markets while enabling new employment opportunities which will in turn will have economic benefits to the region.

To continue to build the ICT workforce and to encourage businesses in Ballarat to take advantage of this workforce and the competitive environment the continued timely deployment of the NBN is essential. As it will result in unique and tangible returns to the Ballarat community, contributing towards meeting its social, economic and environmental needs with potential to reduce disadvantages such as unemployment and create dynamic and sustainable growth in the City.

Having witnessed the initial deployment of NBN fibre and wireless networks within the Ballarat region .We believe employment opportunities could also include the construction and installation of the NBN network by utilizing a large existing telecommunication trained workforce which exists in the Ballarat region. The current initial deployment of the NBN network has resulted in secondary economic advantages to the local business community both services and supply side businesses.

The City of Ballarat, Ballarat ICT Ltd and the University of Ballarat, strongly support the growth and expansion of the eHealth industry sector. The Grampians Region strategic directions confirm the importance of focusing on services needed to sustain health and quality of life as catalysts for significant, positive change. Ballarat has in the past and continues to maximise the opportunity to engage and utilise local leaders in the eHealth sector in plans and actions to grow this important industry sector. There is a significant capacity to leverage off the established ICT industry sector.

There is considerable expertise in both the healthcare and ICT industries of Ballarat. This community of health and ICT professionals form partnerships that lead to development and innovation in eHealth. Where these partnerships are guided by an effective strategy and a clear vision for the future, excellence in eHealth results.

For the NBN to have the impact required in regional Australia and especially the Ballarat region it is very important that the originally planned maximum speed of 100mbps be delivered to 90% of its citizens with adequate backhaul to ensure optimum use. Ballarat ICT acknowledges that other communication technologies may be able to deliver these speeds in the current environment, but its view is that to provide a network that is relatively future proof and ensure a long term economic return of capital, the network needs to be upgradeable to higher speeds as new applications and services are developed that utilise the bandwidth made available.