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Submission 063
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23 January 2011

Mr Andrew McGowan
Inquiry Secretary
Email: ic.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr McGowan,

RE: New Inquiry into 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 new inquiry into the National Broadband Network.

Yours Faithfully,

Ian Fry
Executive Officer
Ballarat ICT Limited

**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure
and Communications**

New Inquiry to the National Broadband Network

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

Strategically located in the Central Highlands region of Victoria, Ballarat is approximately 110km north-west of Melbourne, the State capital. Access to other key regional centres is excellent via four main State highways which radiate from Ballarat. These highways provide easy access to centres such as Melbourne, Adelaide, Geelong and Portland; regional locations like Bendigo and Mildura, and agricultural areas in the Mallee and Wimmera.

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.

In the period to 2030, the Ballarat population is expected to grow by up to 40,000 people. Like the rest of Victoria, Ballarat's population is aging, with the number of people over the age of 65 projected to grow by 60 percent over the next 20 years. This has significant implications for services, jobs, the type of residential accommodation which is being provided, and Ballarat's social mix.

The ICT industry in Ballarat boasts employees from Telstra, Neighborhood Cable, IBM, and a variety of State Government agencies who have regional operations focused on delivering services across the state from Ballarat. Ballarat also enjoys a competitive infrastructure delivering broadband speeds up to 100mbps. With this level of infrastructure available Ballarat is in a good 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

Ballarat ICT 2030: A Strategy and Plan for the Future (www.ballaratict.com.au/2030), represents a joint undertaking by Ballarat ICT Limited, the City of Ballarat and the University of Ballarat to develop the next generation strategy for ICT in the Ballarat region. It provides a framework from which to develop ICT capacity, investment and employment opportunities.

In effect, the 2030 Strategy provides a blueprint for Ballarat's future global competitiveness which will require a full broadband structure to help fully realise its goals

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 have economic benefits to the region.

To continue to build the ICT workforce and to encourage businesses to Ballarat to take advantage of this workforce and the competitive environment deployment of the NBN is essential. 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.

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 effective strategy and a clear vision for the future, excellence in eHealth results.

GRHA (Grampians Rural Health Alliance) has a significant private broadband network which is delivering substantial value to all the health services within the Grampians region, by providing access to VOIP, videoconferencing and internet services, the Grampians Rural Health Alliance is considered one of the leaders in Australia of sustainable TeleHealth services. The Clever Health project has been an outstanding success in embedding significant change in the way health services do business and deliver services to regional communities across the region.

The range of services which are using the network to provide services across the region are Mental health, emergency care, ambulance retrieval services, diabetes educators, stomal therapists, palliative care physicians, aged care assessment services which is results in more effective use of scarce resources, speech therapy, dietitians, physiotherapists, GPs, especially after hours, and the list is growing as staff across the region develop increasing confidence in the technology and the network. To guarantee the network does not reach end of life and continues to develop and have the ability and capacity to further enhance these health services and extend its reach it must be available on a much wider scale making NBN deployment essential.

For the NBN to have the impact required in regional Australia and especially the Ballarat region it is very important that the current 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. Currently, the best technology available that meets this need is Fibre to the Premise. Given the rollout timetable expected of NBN, it should be expected that the network will be requiring an upgrade mid build, i.e. every 5 -7 years, based on current industry bandwidth growth incurred over the last 10 years.