

**SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY**

**MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY**  
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY  
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

18 OCT 2012

Senator Louise Pratt  
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator <sup>Louise</sup>

**Broadband services in Lord Howe Island**

Thank you for your letter dated 9 May 2012 regarding internet services on Lord Howe Island. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

I am aware of the telecommunication issues on Lord Howe Island and can understand the disappointment of residents who feel that reliable broadband services are not available on the island. As noted in the hearing you conducted, the residents of Lord Howe Island have previously decided not to allow coverage by mobile wireless services (such as 3G), which would provide both mobile telephone and broadband coverage for island residents and visitors. This means that a technology that is widely used on the mainland cannot be accessed on Lord Howe Island.

Notwithstanding this decision, the Australian Government has supported improved telecommunications on the island via the former Australian Broadband Guarantee (ABG) program. The ABG was a government initiative that helped residential and small business premises access high-quality broadband services and targeted premises that were unable to access commercial metro-comparable services, particularly those living in remote parts of Australia. A total of 221 Lord Howe Island residents accessed the ABG program, representing a total value of \$488 600.

In relation to the complaints that were raised at the hearing regarding broadband services provided on the island under the auspices of the former ABG program, I am pleased to report that my department has conducted an investigation into these services and a draft report has been forwarded to the provider in question for comment. Once the investigation has concluded, the department will make decisions on required actions by providers and will respond to all affected ABG customers.

However, it is clear from the investigation that broadband services from this Provider are not metro-comparable and therefore insufficient for many of its customers. The two other ABG Providers do not offer metro-comparable services to new customers, although one Provider is offering commercial satellite broadband services to small business customers.

The government is committed to high-speed broadband for all Australians, not just people who live in the capital cities. On 7 September 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced that regional Australia will be given priority in the National Broadband Network (NBN) rollout. NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) has brought forward the introduction of wireless and satellite services so that regional Australians can get access to better broadband as soon as possible.

NBN Co launched its Interim Satellite Service (ISS) on 1 July 2011 to provide eligible rural and regional Australians with immediate access to enhanced broadband services ahead of NBN Co's Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) in 2015. Unfortunately, the main satellite upon which NBN Co's ISS is hosted does not have coverage over Lord Howe Island. I can advise you that NBN Co is investigating other options which may allow it to offer ISS services to Lord Howe Island in 2013.

If NBN Co is able to offer services, all Lord Howe Island residential and small business premises will be eligible for the ISS, as there are no alternative commercial metro-comparable services currently available.

As you are aware, Lord Howe Island will be served by NBN Co's LTSS. The LTSS will provide a significant improvement in the quality of broadband services to Australia's most remote locations. The LTSS will provide superior services, including access to video-conferencing, multicasting and commercial grade services to support bandwidth intensive e-education and e-health applications.

The next-generation NBN satellite network is being engineered specifically to deliver high-speed broadband to regional and remote communities, with higher speeds to become available as technologies improve. These services will be the equivalent of, or better than, what many experience with ADSL today.

The NBN will ensure that every community in regional Australia gets fair and equal access to affordable high-speed broadband. The government's commitment to a uniform national wholesale price for NBN services means that, for the first time in Australia, people will pay the same wholesale price for the same service, whether they live in the city, in regional Australia or in more remote parts of the country.

NBN Co is moving as quickly as practical to roll out the network, including to Lord Howe Island. However, this is one of the largest infrastructure projects in Australia's history, and as with any major project of this size and complexity, the planning and design phases must be undertaken to ensure that the rollout occurs as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

It is important to remember that ultimately, no-one will miss out. Under the Gillard Government, 100 per cent of Australian premises will have access to the NBN, including all homes and businesses in Lord Howe Island.

I hope this information is useful to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Conroy".

Stephen Conroy  
Minister for Broadband,  
Communications and the Digital Economy