

## **OPINIONS AND PROPOSALS WITH RESPECT TO MY VIEWS OF THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK**

Submitted by: **Louise Degeling**

My **experience and views of the roll-out of the National Broadband Network** as it has affected myself and my husband, **what issues are apparent and what proposals I suggest for how problems may be addressed**, is set out below. It has not been a happy process. However, just prior to writing this, I checked on the NBN availability site and discovered our 'address is now connected to the NBN network via FTTN' etc. Maybe this time, we thought. But on checking with our service provider, the NBN site is inaccurate, again. The provider was able to 'dig deeper' on the site and discovered our address is 'unserviceable at this time'. Very frustrating indeed.

I believe it is extremely important for the Joint Standing Committee on the NBN to be aware of the farcical, incompetent, frustrating, time-wasting and inexcusable process we, and our neighbours, have been forced to go through to arrive at this point.

My husband and I are retired now. We had been involved with very small professional businesses during semi-retirement. We 'worked' because we liked to and it helped to keep our minds active. We also enjoy watching television, especially SBS and ABC and use our computers and tablets for exploring the www. We volunteer in our local community and church during the week and often on weekends as well.

Currently we rely on Foxtel's satellite transmissions for TV programs and Wireless Broadband for the internet on our computers and tablets. However, this is not always satisfactory as the internet is often 'down' because of atmospheric disturbances. The NBN was going to enhance our visual entertainment, research and exploration of the World Wide Web, as well as keep us in FaceTime contact with close family who live overseas. We are able to do this with Wireless Broadband but often end up disconnected or with 'scrambled' transmission.

When the NBN informed us in February 2016, via their "Check Your Address" availability site, that our address could be switched to the NBN network, we were thrilled.

On 5<sup>th</sup> February, we engaged Optus, our then telephone and internet provider, to connect us to the NBN. In late March/early April the modem, and Fetch set-top box, were switched on but no signal was reaching either device. Various technicians investigated but none could help sort out the trouble, including Optus technicians. Many calls to NBN and Optus for help were to no avail. Optus requested the set-top box be returned when we could not connect but allowed us to keep the

modem. Being absolute novices to the whole affair, we did not realise (nor did anyone else in the street) that we needed the cables and nodes to get on the NBN. We were under the mistaken belief that the letters from Optus stating we were 'good to go' meant that. As far as Optus and Telstra were concerned, and NBN's site had 'said', we were connected. But of course we weren't.

Around late April, the NBN cables were finally laid and two street nodes were installed and were supposedly operating (they emit a pulsating green glow, very visible at night). But that's all they did, emit the glow, and they still are doing so.

Over the ensuing months, calls were made to NBN and Optus, with no satisfactory conclusion. Each time the experience was excruciating. Often, call centre staff did not speak nor understand English very well at all. Usually, I was put on hold while waiting for a more 'senior' person to speak to me, once for over four hours because I was determined to get a definitive answer to my questions but, as usual, it was a waste of time. I began keeping notes of the calls from May, 2016. The main problem, other than language difficulties with staff whose English language skills were very poor, was Optus and Telstra did not seem to be able to definitively find out what was happening and NBN had no idea either. As I said in a letter I sent to Ms. Lucy Wicks, our local Federal Member, dated 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2016, every time I called NBN direct, I spoke to an overseas call centre who told me I could connect to the NBN. I also had contact with Senator Deborah O'Neill, our local Senate member, who also tried to sort things out but both MPs' efforts were to no avail. I gave up trying in late October. There did not seem to be any use as I was not getting anywhere and the emotional toil and frustration was not doing me any good and was not helping get an NBN connection anyway.

The issues are as follows :

- i) NBN was slow to roll out the promised network in our street.

NBN should explain to its potential customers the reason why this is so; the remedies being planned for implementation/remediation and a definitive date for completion. The website should not state one thing but the reality be another.

- ii) The call centres of Optus and NBN are totally unsatisfactory as they give false information; are overworked and understaffed, with long waiting times for calls to be answered; Are usually not in Australia and their staff do not know the local area and do not understand English as well as they could; Staff do not appear to have much technical training either, which would be of help to them. They try hard to please but can only give out what their screens tell them, which was, in our case, often false or misleading.

NBN should upgrade its call centre information daily. The hiring of Australian staff in all the call centres dealing with NBN issues would alleviate the problems of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

iii) The training of all technicians should be improved. The task of installing the NBN is not an easy one, I suppose, and the skills of the NBN technical team/technical worker needs upgrading, especially including those subcontracted to do NBN's work, e.g. Some of the so called technical teams' members subcontracted by NBN to 'fix the problems' with the node would stand around looking and scratching their heads, obviously not knowing what to do. One time, a subcontractor showed me two pits located close to the node, each of which contained a bundle of wires wrapped together. The problem was the two sets of wires had to be connected together before the NBN could be activated, as one set was from the NBN itself and the other set was the wires which ran underground to the connections to the houses in the street. They had not been joined together. He couldn't do the job as he wasn't an NBN technician. Off he went, promising to report the snafu, but we didn't see anyone else at the node until this year. (The node is very close to our property boundary so we can see most activity which is going on there). As the NBN is still not working (as from 29.3.17) maybe the two sets of wires have not been connected at all.

iv) NBN needs to follow up directly with phone calls or emails to the customers who have complained and inform them of whether the site is working or not; explain the issues for any delay and what time frame is promised for a proper, working installation. It is now over a year since we read on the NBN site that we were NBN ready and now we read the same again but neither time has it been true. It is not how a professional, tax-payer funded entity should carry out its business. It only brings annoyance and great frustration to its potential customers. It is also causing concern as warning signage has been seen in the area that "time is running out to connect to the NBN". We would love to connect, but each time we try we are told we cannot. However, no one in Optus or NBN can say why.

On 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, I rang NBN Complaints for an update. I was informed *for the first time*, the reasons for delays on connections to the NBN for some people in this street. There are some old wires connecting to some people's homes which are part of an old network (a pair gains system) and they have to be replaced before NBN can connect from the Node to the home. He understood the wires will be replaced by the end of March and NBN should be available to everyone in the street at that time. This pair gains system issue was brought up to technicians working on site last September or October by my husband. He suggested this was *one* possible issue which was causing the problem as the pair gains system ran on old wires. A group of also concerned and frustrated neighbours who

were trying to find out what was happening as well were present at the time and were witnesses to this. Obviously the technicians did not take him (or them) seriously or if they did and his suggestion was put forward by the technicians to management for action, then nothing was done until now (?) Whether or not it (the pair gains system) or something else was/is responsible for the lack of success in connecting to the NBN, we should know for sure in the next week or so when we receive a letter from NBN. I believe, and I'm sure my neighbours would agree, we deserve electronic communication rather than 'snail' mail communication of the results, one way or the other, of the latest attempt to connect Fishermans Parade residents to the NBN. We have waited long enough.

Finally, I was told this morning (30.3.17) by a neighbour, some other neighbours may already have NBN. This may be because their homes were constructed (and telephones installed) at a later date than ours and other older homes in the street. Without taking a house-to-house survey of all the residences in the street, I cannot say whether this is true or not and I have run out of time to seek further clarification. NBN yesterday hinted at this possibility but wouldn't give me further details than 'some'. Today, however, was a different story. When I phoned NBN for an update, I was told there is no time frame for the connection; the connection could be as late as 2020 (when all of Australia will be connected, as she pointed out). And there was nothing to show on the young lady's system as to why this earlier date would be so. I didn't bother to ask her about whether neighbours are connected or not. That question seemed to be a waste of time and quite frankly, I was so flabbergasted by her response I didn't want to continue. Maybe if I ring tomorrow I'll get a better response! The NBN call centre staff definitely needs to be better co-ordinated and be reading from the same 'song sheet'!

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to voice my concern, frustration and anger at the manner NBN's rollout is being implemented in my street. I hope some of my proposals for a better service will be acted upon.

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