

21 February 2011

Senator Doug Cameron
Chair
Senate Standing Committee Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Cameron

Inquiry into the National Broadband Network Companies Bill 2010 and the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures – Access Arrangements) Bill 2010

This submission is provided on behalf of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA). The Association represents over 7,000 principals in government, Catholic and independent schools working in every community across Australia.

APPA commends the Australian Government for acting to improve the broadband access available to young Australians in their schools. It is vital that every Australian child is able to enter the virtual world regardless of the geographical location of his or her school. This is especially so for those children living in disadvantaged communities or where a child's personal situation denies access to the resources available to others.

Primary classrooms are no longer places characterised by teacher talk and chalk boards. Twenty-first century technology is available and must not be denied Australia's primary students simply because the infrastructure to access it is not available where they live.

The National Broadband Network (NBN) provides the opportunity for all Australia's primary schools to take advantage of the many technological developments available to the education sector today. For example, interactive whiteboards are a feature of a rapidly increasing number of classrooms. These replace the traditional chalkboard and provide teachers with the tools to engage their students. However, to make the most effective use of these devices, teachers must be able to access the digital teaching resource collection being provided by Education Services Australia and other resources requiring greater bandwidth.

It is also becoming increasingly important for staff in all schools have high quality access to the internet in order to participate in professional development activities without needing to leave the classroom. The NBN must provide sufficient bandwidth to allow all primary school teachers to access VOIP, live webinars, web conferencing and the like. This will be of significant importance over the next few years as the Australian Curriculum is implemented across the nation.

As well, a business rationale for education based on digital reliance requires increasingly sophisticated online activity and levels of connectivity for purposes as diverse as tracking students from school to school, moderating student work and maintaining school operations.

The fact that primary schools are often the first public infrastructure provided in small communities and the last to disappear in communities that are in decline means that they are often situated in areas that do not have a commercial district. While this would increase the cost of providing a high quality broadband connection to every primary school site, APPA would see this as a high level investment in Australia's future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. It has been endorsed by the APPA Secretariat.

Yours sincerely

Norm Hart

President

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