

Senate Select Committee Hearing 11.12.13

I have a short statement.

Firstly, Dr Switkowski has asked me to pass on his apologies for not being able to attend this hearing due a prior commitment as was indicated to the Committee in correspondence.

The committee ordered that six NBN Co officers should attend today's hearing. Unfortunately, due to the Strategic Review being due tomorrow—and the enormous amount of work occurring ahead of that—it was simply not feasible for JB Rousselot and Robin Payne to fly to Canberra this morning.

Mr Rousselot has reiterated that he will be available to attend the committee meeting that has been scheduled for Tuesday next week. We informed the committee of this last night.

Today I am joined by my colleagues Greg Adcock, Kieren Cooney and Gary McLaren.

As Dr Switkowski pointed out in his letter to the Committee of 9 December, “while the review is still being finalised we are somewhat limited in what we are able to discuss, but we remain committed to being available to the Parliament to report on the progress.”

While a working document was provided to the Minister on 2 December, the Strategic Review is yet to be signed off by the NBN Co Board.

Once approved, I understand the government will release a version of it publicly.

The document necessarily contains commercially sensitive information which, if released, would undermine the company's position in upcoming negotiations, and so some information will be redacted.

I know this committee and previous committees respect and understand the need for NBN Co to keep some sensitive information confidential.

I understand that representatives of the company have been invited to appear before this committee next week, and that some consultants have also been invited, and I expect we will be able to answer questions in more detail at that time.

A series of reports in recent weeks has speculated on a document supplied to the previous NBN Co board relating to some issues arising from the coalition's broadband policy.

We have not seen a version of this document; indeed I am unsure if it has been released in full. We can't therefore comment on the specifics of that document.

What I can say, however, is that a high level document was prepared at the request the former Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

This document was based on the company's interpretation of the publicly available information on the Coalition's policy. It was not designed to critique the policy; it was not a business plan or a thorough

financial analysis of potential policies. It merely highlighted issues that would need to be considered in any implementation involving a variety of technologies.

This document is the equivalent of an initial scoping study often used to draw out the key issues before a more thorough examination.

I can reassure the committee that the Strategic Review had access to this document —indeed it had direct access to many of the personnel with knowledge of the issues—and was able to consider all of the issues raised in that document in an objective and thorough manner.

We now welcome your questions.