



PLEASE QUOTE

YOUR REFERENCE:

OUR REFERENCE: SB:JS1101111159

ENQUIRIES TO: Cr Bill Shannon

11th January 2011

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Infrastructure and Communications
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email to: ic.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

**INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF THE
NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK**

I refer to your letter dated 9 December 2010 inviting Council's views on the points of interest referred to in the terms of reference for the inquiry and thank the committee for the opportunity to provide our feedback to this valuable and timely initiative.

Council has in the last few months made submissions to Regional Development Australia (RDA) identifying access to the National Broadband Network (NBN) for the Cassowary Coast region as a major priority project. Council's Economic Development section made a detailed submission identifying the economic, social and environmental benefits of the NBN to the region and the committee is encouraged to refer to this submission as supporting evidence. Council's Economic Development Officer is also a steering group member of the far north Queensland national broadband network project steering committee, which is currently being coordinated by the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and tasked with developing a strategy and business case to identify the far north Queensland region as a priority roll out region for the NBN.

Council believes that the NBN will assist the nation chart a course to maximise the environmental, social and economic potential of information and communication technologies, most notably the internet, a vital medium of promoting economic and social activity, thereby enriching our freedom to do business, work, play, communicate and express ourselves. Successful delivery of the NBN will spur innovation, economic growth and improvements in daily life for both communities and businesses.

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Wider deployment and more effective use of digital technologies will enable the nation to address its key challenges and will provide us with a better quality of life through improvements in the delivery of better health care, equitable access to education, cleaner environment, new media opportunities and easier access to Governments own services.

In response to the terms of reference for this inquiry, please refer to Council's responses addressed below to each point.

a) The delivery of government services and programs

The delivery of all levels of Government services and programs will be enhanced through the NBN. In particular, supporting the engagement between Government and younger citizens who are increasingly turning to new forms of social media to interact with their peers and the community. The aged too will benefit from having access to E-Government services as some services and information will be provided more efficiently and beyond regular hours of operation or location. The Cassowary Coast region through its economic development plan currently being developed has identified the need for E-Government initiatives as a priority.

b) Achieving health outcomes

Programs which promote the use of e-health initiatives and Health Management Information Systems (HMIS) will assist for example with efforts to improve the continuum of care through the integration of hospital care processes and data sharing, the provision of data for health insurance and statistical purposes and an overall improvement in the quality and standardization in medical processes. The overall result will see a marked improvement in the delivery and access to health care and medical procedures which are currently unavailable in regional Australia.

c) Improving the educational resources and training available for teachers and students

The use of E-learning resources will provide an additional much needed mode of delivery of education to the current school based system within the region. The Cassowary Coast region recently did a survey on Skills and Training within the region which indicated in its preliminary findings the desire by employers to provide improved means of accessing training and learning solutions within the local community. E-learning which the World Bank defines as 'the use of computer-based technologies such as the Internet, e-mail, websites and CD-ROMs, to deliver, facilitate and enhance both formal and informal learning and knowledge sharing at any time and any place' will provide the region with the equitable access to education that it currently desires.

d) The management of Australia's built and natural resources and environmental sustainability

The Cassowary Coast region which is blessed with two world heritage listed natural assets in the form of the reef and rainforest hold the management of both the built and natural environment as core to its future. ``````Cont'd/...

The region which is 74% covered by world heritage listed rainforest is limited in the number of traditional industries it can attract and support, however the NBN has the potential to increase the productivity of the region through the introduction of new enterprises and initiatives which rely on the internet and faster forms of communication and therefore do not require the need to plunder or overuse the regions natural resources. The region will also be better able to promote the unique environmental attributes and help the nation and world at large understand the diversity and value of the region and the need to preserve this vulnerable diversity.

e) Impacting regional economic growth and employment opportunities

The NBN has significant impact on economic and employment opportunities. As noted above the development of new industries that rely mainly on the internet will thrive and enhance the regions employment and economic output. Traditional industries will likewise see improvements with more stable and faster access to information thereby improving profitability and productivity. In this day and age the need to be globally competitive in a local context is rapidly changing the business as usual models and for the nation to be competitive, it must enable its regions through the provision of fundamental infrastructure such as that being delivered by the NBN.

f) Impacting business efficiencies and revenues, particularly for small and medium business, and Australia's export market

As noted above business efficiencies and revenues will greatly improve across all sizes of business within regional Australia with the introduction of faster and more stable connectivity of the information and communications technologies currently deployed throughout regional Australia. Stability and access to more choice at a fair cost is a must for regional Australian businesses, which is greatly limited by both at present. Regional Australia which produces two thirds of the nations wealth is the worst resourced in terms of infrastructure of all types. For the nation to progress towards a truly world class digital economy as enjoyed in some parts of Europe and countries like Korea and Singapore the need for projects such as that being delivered by NBN Co. is crucial. All forms of exports, intra state, inter state and overseas are impacted, but can be easily improved.

g) Interaction with research and development and related innovation investment

The delivery of the NBN is in itself an innovative step within a national context, will greatly improve the way regions approach innovation. The investment in innovation, research and development will be improved with better access to information and a cross pollination of ideas from across the nation. The ability to create and support a truly innovation nation concept beyond the capital city boundaries is significantly improved with access to the NBN.

h) Facilitating social and community benefit

As noted previously the social and community benefit to be derived out of the NBN will be an evolving process. Organisations at all levels, even in regional Australia are increasingly aware of the need for simple tools such as a web page. The increase in new forms of social media such as 'Facebook', 'Twitter' and 'Linked In' provide both challenges and opportunities.

These new forms of social media and community interaction are borderless and managed well, will provide untold benefit. The provision of traditional library services for example can be improved with libraries providing much more than just access to books and print media.

- i) The optimal capacity and technological requirements of a network to deliver these outcomes

As noted previously, the simple requirements are for a stable network that provides the fastest rate of data interchange, uninterrupted, non time constrained and location bound at a fair price to the end consumer.

I hope these comments are of assistance to the Committee in undertaking the enquiry.

Yours faithfully

CR BILL SHANNON
MAYOR
CASSOWARY COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL