

Community and Public Sector Union
Nadine Flood – National Secretary

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Infrastructure and Communications
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AUSTRALIA

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25 February 2011

Dear Committee Secretary

CPSU (PSU Group) Submission: Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network

Please find attached the Community and Public Service Union (PSU Group) submission to this Inquiry.

If you require any further information, please contact Dr Kristin van Barneveld on
or by email a

Yours sincerely



Nadine Flood
National Secretary



**CPSU (PSU Group)
Submission**

**Inquiry into the role and potential of
the National Broadband Network**

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Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network

Introduction

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 55,000 members. The CPSU represents employees of the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT Public Service, the NT Public Service, telecommunications, call centres, employment services and broadcasting, with members in every state and territory. CPSU members work in the areas of administration, sales, engineering, communications, information technology, legal, technical, scientific research, broadcasting and many other fields. CPSU represents members throughout the communications industry, including within Telstra and other telecommunications companies such as Primus and Vodafone, and in public and private sector broadcasting.

The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry into the role and potential of the National Broadband Network, a project we support. The CPSU submission does not address all the terms of reference but focuses on areas of our membership coverage in commonwealth and territory governments and in communications.

Terms of Reference

The Committee will examine the capacity of the National Broadband Network to contribute to:

- a) the delivery of government services and programs;
- b) achieving health outcomes;
- c) improving the educational resources and training available for teachers and students;
- d) the management of Australia's built and natural resources and environmental sustainability;
- e) impacting regional economic growth and employment opportunities;
- f) impacting business efficiencies and revenues, particularly for small and medium business, and Australia's export market;
- g) interaction with research and development and related innovation investments;
- h) facilitating community and social benefits; and
- i) the optimal capacity and technological requirements of a network to deliver these outcomes.

a) The delivery of government services and programs

As the principal union in the Australian Public Service (APS), the CPSU believes in a strong public service providing the quality essential services that the Australian community needs. The community relies on Government to deliver these essential services – whether it is through the provision of family benefit payments or pensions, supporting vital scientific research, administration of passports or protection of our borders. Australians also rely on the Government to develop policy solutions to the complicated challenges facing our nation, in areas as diverse as education and skills development, improving our health system, managing our natural environment and waterways, and our involvement on the international stage.

Over the next decade and beyond there will be an increasing demand for public services, with a growing and ageing population imposing greater demands on the way in which public services are delivered, particularly with ongoing technological change. The APS must have the capacity to meet these increasing demands.

The National Broadband Network has the potential to improve the delivery and access to government services and programs in many ways. The increased communications capacity of the NBN roll-out should greatly enhanced performance, reach and cost effectiveness of online government services and community engagement processes. Secure, high speed and widely accessible internet based services assist citizens to access and participate in government, and assists government agencies in providing better integrated and more comprehensive services and information to the community.

The NBN creates the opportunity for a greater physical presence for federal government agencies outside of major capital cities. This has the potential to allow for dispersed networks of federal government “back of office functions” such as claims processing and phone based client service work that can be used to support government shop front services in smaller population centres where the volume of client traffic may have made a physical office presence previously unviable. The location of some government services in regional centres would also provide significant economic benefit to those areas.

The involvement of regional Australia in government policy and service design will also be enhanced by a combination of these factors. Improved communications technology will facilitate a greater capacity to build partnerships with academia, research institutions, the community, and private sectors across broader geographical locations.

A number of Government reports and principles support building partnerships. The government statement on “Social Inclusion Principles for Australia” has a strong emphasis on building partnerships. Principle 8 from this document refers to “*building joined up services and whole of government(s) solutions. Getting different parts and different levels of government to work together in new and flexible ways to get better outcomes and services for people in need.*”¹ The value of building “partnerships with academia, research institutions and the community and private sectors across broader geographical locations” was highlighted in the review of public sector innovation². The Moran Review into Australian government administration also sees improved ICT capacity as vital to improved government administration.³

Policy outcomes will be improved by greater access and closer links with the community. The work of government will also become more visible – another element to encouraging greater participation by the public in government processes. Having a

¹ [Social Inclusion Principles for Australia](http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SIagenda/Principles/Pages/default.aspx). Australian Government, 2010.

<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SIagenda/Principles/Pages/default.aspx>. pg. 3

² *Empowering Change: Fostering Innovation in the Australian Public Service* was released on 21 May 2010 by Australian Public Service Management Advisory Committee.

³ *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration*. May 2010.

http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/aga_reform/aga_reform_blueprint/index.cfm

more connected experience of what is being done by the Government, and having an increased capacity to influence government service design and delivery will encourage community involvement in both the use and design of policy and services.

b) Achieving health outcomes

The NBN has the potential to support improved health outcomes in a range of ways including:

- improved access to diagnostic services and specialist medical advice including the innovative provision of these services to remote communities;
- improved medical data collection to improve the accuracy of individual medical records and the overall collection of data that assists with medical research and monitoring of health trends in our community;
- greater community access to online information on health and lifestyle matters; and
- the capacity to locate more work closer to where people live, thereby reducing work-related travel time and the corresponding risks of adverse occupational health and safety outcomes.

Again, these improvements will be more strongly felt in those areas likely to experience the greatest increase in ICT access; that is outlying metropolitan areas and regional centres.

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

Environmental concerns are at the forefront of much Australian policy debate. The NBN roll-out has the potential to support improved monitoring, data collection and analysis of the broad range of factors that impact on our natural resources and environment.

"Weather at Home"⁴, a global citizen science project relying on a citizen computing initiative is an example of how improved broadband access can be used to increase the capacity of scientific research and involve the community in the project. In what has been labelled as a citizen computing initiative, the down time on the computers of thousands of volunteers around the world will be used to run regional climate simulators. Australians who will gain high speed broadband through the NBN roll out will be able to take part in these types of projects for the first time in a model of citizen engagement that could provide valuable information for policy development in key areas such as climate change.

Another impact arising from the opportunity for private and public enterprises to decentralise some functions is the potential to reduce the impact on existing and over stressed infrastructure caused by long commutes, urban over crowding and the comparatively high energy usage of high rise buildings.

⁴"Future Tense" ABC Radio National. 24 February 2011.

<http://climateprediction.net/weatherathome>

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/futuretense/stories/2011/3144794.htm>

e) Impact on regional economic growth and employment opportunities

The opportunities for the NBN to support both public and private sector employment in regional Australia are significant. Moving some of the work of government agencies to outer or non-metropolitan areas can be a major source of jobs and income for local economies. The government acknowledges that *'regions supported by more than one industry are less likely to be severely affected by shocks'*⁵, this includes communities impacted by cycles of flood and drought, and variations in the economic cycle. Centrelink Rural Call Centres that currently operate in Port Augusta in South Australia and Maryborough in Queensland are examples of government work supporting local economies.

By encouraging diversity and moving some functions to regional centres, the APS will be able to access a broader labour market and encourage the creation of skilled, sustainable jobs across Australia. It is important that this work is performed under conditions that are fair, equitable and consistent with those expected in high population centres, and with APS employment conditions.

Industrial relations and labour market issues such as skill formation and training are matters of strong concern to both the members the CPSU represents in the telecommunications industry, and within the community generally.

On a number of occasions CPSU has advocated for employers involved in the National Broadband Network to adopt employment practices that are consistent with Government policy including:

- a commitment to collectively bargain and to quality jobs;
- the recognition of the right for employees to belong to and be represented by their union;
- access to Fair Work Australia for binding resolution of disputes; and
- a commitment to the development and retention of a skilled workforce within Australia.

We note that there currently exists some tension between technology increasing the capacity for ICT based work to be done anywhere in Australia, and the Telstra program of regional site closures. This program of regional site closures has accelerated over recent years. While technological change may have some impact on the numbers of staff required to do this work, the main driver of these job cuts has been to centralise work primarily to Melbourne and Brisbane with overflow work off-shored to the Philippines. That Telstra staff are not being retrained for the work that will come into regional areas, and the company's practice of centralisation and off-shoring demonstrate that the full potential for the improvement in regional economies that may flow from the NBN roll out is dependent as much on the policies of individual governments and enterprises as it does on the technology that is available to them.

The Australian government is able to directly influence the use of this technology in a way that improves regional employment and economic opportunities through using government procurement to secure training and employment for those living in

⁵ *Global Economic Downturn – Some Implications for Australian Local Governments*. Department of Infrastructures, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. June 2009 pg 2.

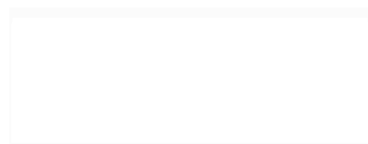
regional communities, and in the policies and practices it adopts in relation to its own areas of work.

Conclusion

The NBN provides Australia with a once in a generation opportunity to assist staff to deliver government and communications services more efficiently and effectively across the whole nation while providing an opportunity to create more balanced regional economies outside of the major cities.

Those currently involved in the work of government around the country are well placed to identify the services and policy functions that would be best enhanced by the opportunities presented by the NBN. We would encourage the broad engagement of staff and their unions in this process.

Realising the potential benefits of the NBN depends on more than just the availability of this technology. What governments, business and communities decide to make of this technology will depend on their vision for what is possible, their level of engagement with APS staff and communities, and the practical application of publicly stated commitments to social inclusion, fairness and innovation. It is also vital that measures are put in place to ensure that this technology is not used to take work away from regional communities and reduce the direct engagement of the public with government through the public service. Government service delivery simply by the rollout of internet kiosks is not a model for improved community engagement and service delivery, and must not be an outcome resulting from the NBN rollout.



Nadine Flood
National Secretary

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