



Australian Government

**Department of Broadband, Communications
and the Digital Economy**

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**Submission to the Joint Committee on the
National Broadband Network**

**Fifth Review of the Rollout of the
National Broadband Network**

April 2013

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE)
Submission to the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network (JCNBN)

Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee Review

The 2011–12 Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) reviewed telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia, paying particular regard to initiatives that will enable regional communities to participate in, and realise the opportunities of, the digital economy.

The independent committee's report (the Sinclair Review) was tabled in parliament on 23 May 2012. The report contained a total of 33 recommendations. The recommendations included a proposal for a co-investment program, jointly funded by the Commonwealth and interested states or territory governments, to expand the mobile coverage footprint in regional Australia (recommendation 3.2). The committee also recommended that NBN Co engage with mobile carriers about using NBN fixed-wireless towers to also improve mobile coverage (recommendation 4.5).

The Australian government responded to the recommendations of the Sinclair Review on 23 August 2012. We note the Victorian Government's submission of 18 February 2013 to the JCNBN fifth review into the NBN rollout present their views on the government's response to the Sinclair Review.

Mobile phone coverage

NBN Co is responsible for designing, building and providing wholesale access to high-speed broadband to all Australian premises.

The rollout of the NBN will see the construction of many new fixed wireless towers that are designed to provide broadband services to locations across less-populated areas of Australia.

In its response to the Sinclair Review, the government agreed with the committee's recommendation that the construction of the NBN fixed wireless network provides an opportunity for carriers to expand their mobile phone coverage in certain locations across regional Australia by co-locating equipment in new towers built to support the network.

The government agrees that NBN Co and mobile carriers should work together to take advantage of the NBN fixed wireless towers to improve mobile coverage in regional Australia, where possible, and we note that NBN Co, Telstra and Optus have recently entered into agreements to share tower infrastructure. This is obviously a positive development towards improved mobile coverage in regional and rural Australia.

Decisions about whether to seek access to NBN Co's fixed wireless tower network infrastructure remain a commercial decision for the mobile phone carriers.

In addition, NBN Co has negotiated with carriers to secure further mutually beneficial arrangements which involve NBN Co accessing or constructing towers on sites that have been set aside for future development. This would apply when a carrier has a site for which it has all or some of the necessary approvals, but are not planning to build a tower in the near future. If such a site is considered appropriate for the fixed wireless network, NBN Co will initiate the construction process. This has the potential of seeing the networks expand at a quicker rate than they otherwise would.

As noted in its response to the Sinclair Review, the government will review the impact of the NBN fixed wireless network on improving mobile coverage in regional areas before making any commitments to fund a new program to extend mobile coverage. Developments in this area are being monitored by the government. A date for this review will be determined once the NBN fixed wireless network has further progressed.