



TORRES SHIRE COUNCIL

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17 September 2008

Alison Kelly
Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network
S1.61 Parliament House
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Re: Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network

Dear Ms Kelly

Torres Shire Council appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to your Committee.

Terms of Reference

1. That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee on the National Broadband Network, be established to inquire into and report by **30 March 2009** on:
 - a. the Government's proposal to partner with the private sector to upgrade parts of the existing network to fibre to provide minimum broadband speeds of 12 megabits per second to 98 per cent of Australians on an open access basis; and
 - b. the implications of the proposed National Broadband Network (NBN) for consumers in terms of:
 - i. service availability, choice and costs,
 - ii. competition in telecommunications and broadband services, and
 - iii. likely consequences for national productivity, investment, economic growth, cost of living and social capital.

Torres Shire Council

The Shire of Torres is the northernmost Queensland local authority, and it comprises all of the State lying north of latitude 11 degrees south. This includes the northernmost part of Cape York Peninsula, together with the islands of Torres Strait. The Shire's administrative centre is located on Thursday Island, which provides the primary service centre for the region.

Torres Shire is the only Australian local government which abuts an international border (Australia and Papua New Guinea) and is in close proximity to the Indonesian

province of Irian Jaya. This alone places the people of the Shire in a unique part of the country.

An extensive reliable coverage is crucial in the areas of Immigration, Customs and Quarantine. Service across the shire will assist community members to provide up to date information to these enforcement agencies and allow them to receive warnings/notices as required.

Access to internet banking is imperative as the only available banking service is situated on Thursday Island with all other residents of the Shire relying on internet services to operate their personal and business finances. Again the inability of many residents to access Broadband puts them at a distinct disadvantage to the general community.

As travel throughout the region is predominately by outboard motor powered aluminium dinghy, the safety aspects of a reliable service are imperative. Community ability to access the latest weather and tide information is paramount to safe travel between islands.

Council experiences major problems in respect of broadband access at Horn Island where the Council owned and operated airport is located. Operational facts and details on the airport follow.

Horn Island Airport

Airport Usage- Qantaslink: Passenger movements for July 2008 total: 5669 (Arrivals: 2295, Departures: 3374).

Aircraft: A total of 1783 aircraft movements were recorded for the month of July (average 57+/day), a total of 616 aircraft (average 20 aircraft/night) was logged overnight parking for the month of August. The Horn Island (Ngurupai) Airport is owned and operated by the Torres Shire Council. It is considered to be the gateway to the Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area. The airport is located approximately 8km from Thursday Island on Horn Island.

Operational Information: The aerodrome operator and licensee is the Chief Executive Officer, Torres Shire Council. The aerodrome is licensed and maintained as a "Licensed International Aerodrome" and consists of two sealed runways - RWY08/26 (Length: 1389 x Width: 30 metres) and RWY14/32 (Length: 1235 x Width: 23 metres). RWY08/26 is equipped with runway lights and PAPI (Pilot Activated Path Indicator).

Airline Operators: Qantaslink (of Qantas Airlines) operates a twice-daily RPT (regular passenger transport) service between Horn Island and Cairns, Regional Pacific Airlines and Aerotropics operate daily RPT services to the majority of the Torres Strait Islands. Other operators who offer charter services throughout the Torres Straits & Northern Peninsula Area include Barrier Aviation, Skytrans, Cape York Air and Cape Air Transport. Additional to this, Reef Helicopters and Cape York Helicopters also provide helicopter charter services.

The strategic importance of the airport in providing a vital central service link for regional air transport, border security protection and the fact it is designated international status with Commonwealth agencies (AQIS, ACS & DIMA) including

Coastwatch & EMQ contractor (Australian Helicopters) present or utilise on a regular basis.

The Airport does not have ADSL (available in nearby Wasaga Village) with the Airport Manager's connection (and the nearby quarry's office) to the Council network is by wireless broadband. The Airport Manager believes ADSL2 is, or will soon be available to areas which already receive ADSL. To the best of his knowledge, he believes Torres Shire Council has the hardware capabilities at the airport Telstra exchange but not enough voices to make it happen.

12Mbs is a pipe dream for us living and working in "remoteness".

There are two other populated Islands within 1 kilometre of Thursday Island being Prince of Wales Island and Hammond Island. Availability to the internet from these locations is via dial up, wireless or satellite. Dial up speeds are very slow ranging from 14kpbs to a maximum of 28.8 kbps, wireless is okay however it is subject to black spots and atmospheric conditions and at times it is difficult to find a good signal strength. This connection is also subject to drops outs due to loss of signal strength, previous experience with satellite shows it has too much down time due to technical glitches or weather.

Councils IT Officer resides on Hammond Island and is often required to remotely connect to the Torres Shire Council Network from this location to remedy technical problems that happen from time to time particularly out of normal office hours.

As no ADSL service is available on Hammond Island connection has to be made by a wireless device by connecting to the internet and then creating a "VPN" connection to Torres Shire Council Network. As stated earlier this is subject to loss of signal strength and connection drop outs. A fixed ADSL connection to both Hammond Island and Prince of Wales Island should remedy these problems delivering a stable cost effective broadband service to these communities.

Horn Island Future Development: With very limited land development opportunity on neighbouring Thursday Island, Horn Island has great potential for development, particularly through House/Land subdivisions. The residential accommodation is paramount for the Torres Shire to meet the heavy demand for persons who are required in the expanding employment needs of government, tourism and hospitality, and associated private industry. Realistically, Horn Island will become the "satellite" development centre of the Torres Shire, particularly with the completion of the sewerage scheme within the next two months.

Summary: Torres Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to submit its views on the urgent need for improvements to Broadband in remote areas of Australia. Council looks forward to your further advice on the Committee's deliberations and of course, Council is most willing to provide any clarification of issues raised in this submission.

Yours faithfully

Bernie McCarthy
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER