



INDIGENOUS REMOTE COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

July 3, 2009

Alison Kelly
Secretary
Select Committee on the National Broadband Network
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Kelly and Committee,

Thank you for your request for comment on the new policy direction of Government announced on April 7, 2009 in relation to the National Broadband Network.

IRCA is pleased to offer the following comments in accordance with the Committee's new Terms of Reference.

Terms of Ref.	Issue	Recommendation or comment
a.	Economic & cost/benefit analysis...	Policy direction should achieve well in this area.
b.	Ownership, governance and operating arrangements	Government should maintain majority ownership of the proposed 'arms length' Company
f.	Effects of NBN on availability, price, choice, level of innovation and service characteristics of broadband products in metropolitan, outer-metro, semi-rural and rural and regional areas and towns.	No mention of 'Remote' here! But assume this is included? Price is a key concern if remote communities are going to be able to participate and draw down economic, social and cultural benefits. Would suggest that subsidisation of broadband products for Remote Indigenous communities be embedded in the business case. The benefits to the broader economy in return would be an enhanced Tourism industry benefiting from enriched cultural and social capital of Indigenous language

		speaking Australians accessible online and via GPS travel products i.e. through iPhones etc.
g.	Extent of demand and ...factors influencing consumer choice for broadband products...	With the switchover to Digital television by 2013 and lack of availability of spectrum, the future of the rich offerings and valued role of Indigenous Community Television and Indigenous Remote Media Associations themselves are at risk, their survival hinging on their capacity to use broadband to 'go digital' and embrace web-based platforms and products, explore converging media opportunities across digital television, mobile phones, computers via operating community telecentres (where remote people can access training and support, and develop their ability become 'content producers') is contingent upon a well serviced broadband environment!
h.	...any technical, economic commercial, regulatory, social or other barriers that may impede attaining the Government's stated goal for broadband availability...	<p>There is concern that what with significant language and cultural barriers; along with the geographical isolation of our stakeholders, once again an appropriate consultation process will be omitted in relation to the rollout of the NBN - leading to inappropriate and undesirable outcomes for remote communities.</p> <p>To avoid this occurrence IRCA would strongly recommend the allocation of one of the 12 Rural NBN Coordinator's being proposed, be based at and work with IRCA as the peak body. This would enable the NBN Company to engage with the 8 Remote Media Organizations (with whom IRCA teleconference on a monthly basis). This would facilitate close consultation with RIMOS, their technicians and importantly their Indigenous Board Members, who have intimate knowledge of their regions needs and practices and could assist the Government identify and provide the best options.</p> <p>It would also enable good lines of communication between Government and the Sector around the issues of network maintenance, governance, infrastructure and the facilitation of access and training</p>

		that will be required enabling Remote Australians to engage and reap benefits from the NBN.
i.	The appropriate public policy goals for communications in Australia...	There is a relevance here for NBN infrastructure to impact positively on the Government's 'Bridging the Gap' commitment and play a key role in delivering services, improving quality of life and enabling and the empowerment of Indigenous Australians who having a critical need for 'cultural safety'.

IRCA commends the Government on its new policy around the National Broadband Network. The feedback from the Remote Indigenous Media Sector is quite hopeful at this stage.

IRCA also wishes to advise the Committee that it is awaiting confirmation of funding to conduct a Digital Futures Forum in Alice Springs in early September to bring policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders from the Sector together to discuss the technologies, changes and opportunities afforded by the coming rollout of the national Broadband network and the Switchover to Digital Television by 2013.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We are greatly encouraged by the policy and look forward to working with Government to ensure best results for remote Indigenous Australians.

Sincerely,

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