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Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network
Department of the Senate
PO BOX 6100
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
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Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the Senate Select Committee

In its Interim Report on the 2009 Victorian Bushfires the resultant Royal Commission released many findings, one of which, number 3.75 states:

“A number of submission authors called for the power and telephone lines to be underground and, where they had to be above ground, suggested that power poles should not be wooden. As outlined in the One Tree Hill Ferry Creek Residents’ submissions:

During every serious emergency (fire or storm), the power goes down, in some cases, electricity cables cause fires. With increased reliance on power and phone cables, not least for planned safety communications, it is time to put them underground.”

Unfortunately the price we currently pay for having power lines and many communication lines strung across the nation between the rotting telegraph poles built to meet the demands of the nineteenth century is a lack of reliability, especially in times of emergency. The lines will, no doubt, come down whenever the wind blows or the fires burn.

The question now has to be asked, “Why is the proposed National Broadband Network (NBN), the twenty first century platform for nation building, to be strung between those same rotting telegraph poles built to meet the demands of the nineteenth century?” This proposed network of strategically important, but highly vulnerable web of hundreds of thousands of kilometres of overhead cables needs to go underground. To place such a network at risk by stringing it between antiquated, rotten and unsafe poles rather than undergrounding negates the vision behind providing access to the modern web.

In every bushfire around Sydney in the past 30 years, wooden power and telephone poles have been burnt down cutting communication in times of crisis. When the poles come down the wires break! If the NBN is strung aurally and susceptible to the whims of nature it won't be an easy operation to then join a brittle glass fibre to restore the communication network on which the community is relying heavily. Some say the solution is to replace the wooden poles with concrete replicas. Unfortunately the wires still come down and the results remain the same.

We only need to look at the Victorian bushfires mentioned above; the 1994 bushfires which struck across Sydney; the 2003 ACT fires; and the storms of western Sydney of 2008 (to name a few instances) to see the catastrophic results of this cheap, antiquated means of network construction.

The time has now arrived for the government to show leadership and provide a world's best practice broadband network. This is also the opportunity to align the building of this network with the eradication of the unsafe, dangerous hardwood pole and underground all aerial cable networks of power and communication. We need the governments of Australia to work together and we need strategic networks the community can rely upon, especially in the hours of need.

Yours faithfully

Greg Bleazard