

Minority Report - Government Senators

1.1 Government Senators note that this is the third Interim Report of the Senate Select Committee on the National Broadband Network, with the earlier reports having been tabled in December 2008 and May 2009.

1.2 Consistent with the previous approach by Opposition Senators, we believe that the conclusions and recommendations arising from the Majority Report are not necessarily reflective of the evidence presented, rather an affirmation of the Opposition parties criticisms of the Government's telecommunications policies.

1.3 Accordingly, Government Senators disagree with all but one of the Opposition Senators recommendations. In particular, we highlight the contradictory stance of Opposition Senators that on the one hand argue for delay in proceeding with the NBN until further work is undertaken (Majority Report Recommendations 2, 4, 5 and 6) and on the other hand complains that the Government is not moving fast enough to build the NBN and recommends (Majority Report Recommendation No. 3) to bring the NBN-specific legislation forward.

1.4 In addition, the Opposition Senators recommend (Majority Report Recommendation No. 1) the consecutive roll-out across metropolitan, regional and rural areas while at the same time recommending (Majority Report Recommendations No. 7, 8 and 9) that no further work take place until all implementation studies and cost analyses are completed, made public and assessed independently, and then reviewed annually by the Productivity Commission.

1.5 This indicates their continuing opposition to the Labor Government's policy of a National Broadband Network. This opposition is thinly veiled in a series of recommendations that seek to delay the complex process of preparing the implementations study but it is overt in Recommendation 11, which specifically seeks to delay the necessary regulatory reform that would ensure that while the NBN is rolled out, the necessary reforms are made to the existing regime to ensure more effective competition and stronger consumer safeguards.

1.6 The Government seeks to press ahead with their visionary policy for a National Broadband Network for all Australians to ensure that our economy and society is well placed to secure the productivity and connectivity benefits afforded by an efficient, future-proof high-bandwidth network.

1.7 The Opposition has not articulated an alternative policy to deliver a universal high-bandwidth network to all Australians, choosing instead to represent the interests of the residual monopoly incumbent Telstra throughout the course of the inquiry.

1.8 Whilst not directly related to the establishment of the NBN Co, the Telecommunications Competition and Consumer Safeguards Bill was explored

towards the end of this committee's considerations, notwithstanding its consideration by another Senate Committee.

1.9 Government Senators note that this Bill, if passed, would improve competition in the telecommunication sector and strengthen consumer protections while the NBN is rolled out over the next eight years by rectifying the well-established deficiencies in the existing regulatory framework. The recommendation to delay the consideration of this Bill is therefore further evidence of the Opposition's intent to delay and obfuscate the necessary reforms to the existing telecommunications regulatory regime.

1.10 Government Senators would like to acknowledge and thank witnesses for appearing, some for third time, and providing their evidence, much of which is informative and useful to the public understanding of the progress of the national Broadband Network. Where this evidence has been accurately reflected in the body of the report, we Government Senators are happy to associate with it.

1.11 Only one recommendation, No.10, is supported by Government Senators as this is work already being embarked upon by a range of organisations and firms across the public and private sector. This recommendation advocates the development of new applications for use on the National Broadband Network, a task the Government is already enthusiastically engaged in.

1.12 Government Senators noted with great interest the examples of high-bandwidth applications and services being developed in health, education, community and emergency services. The "Realising our Broadband Future" Forum announced by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy for the December 10 2009, is an example of the strong Government focus that is building around the new and innovative services and applications that will be possible with a universal high bandwidth network for all Australians such as the NBN will provide.

Senator Kate Lundy

Senator Glenn Sterle

25 November 2009