

INFORMATION PAPER

BROADBAND AND THE RESILIENCE OF REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

BACKGROUND

Access to affordable, fast, reliable broadband is essential to the resilience and ongoing sustainability of regional communities. Broadband infrastructure is a key resource in enabling communities to adapt to change, to mobilise capacity and information, and in the delivery of key social and economic services and opportunities.

This paper is to provide context for a future discussion on the importance of broadband to how regional communities adapt and respond to events such as the global economic crisis.

NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The Government has in place an integrated series of measures to promote access to broadband. At the forefront is the announcement that the Government has established a new company to build and operate a new superfast National Broadband Network. The company will invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to fund the rollout and ongoing operations of the network.

The Government's objective is to achieve 90 per cent coverage through a fibre-to-the-premises network, with the remaining coverage to be delivered through next generation wireless and satellite technologies that can deliver 12 Mbps or more. The Network will significantly improve competition and choice in telecommunications services in regional areas, and will be complemented by the fast-tracking of a \$250 million investment in regional 'backbone' infrastructure under the *Regional Backbone Blackspots Program*. This will benefit regional areas where there is a lack of competitive 'backbone' services.

In the 2009-10 Budget the Government also announced the \$80 million *Rural and Regional National Broadband Network Initiative*, which includes the \$60 million *Digital Regions Initiative* to co-fund innovative digital enablement projects with state, territory and local governments. The Government has also provided an additional \$250.8 million in funding for the *Australian Broadband Guarantee* to provide all Australian residents with access to metro-comparable broadband services that reasonably compare to broadband services available in metropolitan areas.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Protection of critical infrastructure, such as broadband, is particularly important for regional communities. Broadband access promotes local economic development and benefits businesses, facilitates social interaction and communication, and supports delivery of key services such as health, education and emergency services. The Australian Government brings together owners and operators of Australia's critical infrastructure in the telecommunications, international submarine cables, postal and broadcasting sectors to share information and discuss key issues on critical infrastructure protection.



THE GLASSON REVIEW

The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, chaired by Dr Bill Glasson AO, reviewed the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia. The Review's report, *Framework for the Future*, made a number of recommendations relating to telecommunications infrastructure, the availability of broadband and mobile services, and on customer rights and representation.

On 5 March 2009, the Australian Government responded to the recommendations made by the Committee. In its response, the Government acknowledged the important role of telecommunications in regional areas. Recommendation 1.6.1 of the Review suggested:

“The Australian Government facilitate greater involvement of local governments in the design and delivery of initiatives to promote greater access to telecommunications infrastructure in their area.”

The Government is seeking the ACLG's views on options to progress this recommendation, consistent with the Government's view that collaboration between all spheres of government is fundamental to addressing the ongoing telecommunications needs of regional Australians.

More information on these initiatives can be found at www.dbcde.gov.au.



An Australian Government Initiative

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