



AUSTRALIAN LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS INQUIRY INTO THE  
NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK**

24 February 2011

# **ALGA SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK**

## **Introduction**

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Committee on Infrastructure and Communications inquiry into the National Broadband Network (the Committee).

ALGA represents the interests of Australia's more than 560 councils at the national level. ALGA is a federation of Australia's associations of local government in each state and territory, and includes the ACT Government as a direct member, reflecting the latter's unique combination of municipal and territory functions. ALGA's submission should be read in conjunction with any submissions put forward by its member associations and/or individual councils.

ALGA has advocated the establishment of broadband and has been at the forefront of calls for greater connectivity across all communities in Australia. ALGA believes that one of the key challenges as Australia moves further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to ensure that telecommunications services, including high-speed broadband, are equitably delivered and affordably priced for all Australians, and that no group of Australians gets left behind as technologies become more advanced.

## **The importance of broadband to communities and their development**

ALGA has argued consistently that broadband is a key enabler of services and strongly supports the need to focus on realising the opportunity and understanding the potential that access to the National Broadband Network (NBN) will provide to business, communities and governments, including local government.

Access to broadband will build on the benefits that flow from access to online services in general. The advent of online services provided government organisations with a cost effective delivery channel to customers. Local governments have identified the potential benefits of going online in order to:

- extend and enhance the service delivery capabilities of local government to the community;
- realise efficiency and productivity gains with the aim of reducing the cost of service delivery;
- provide a greater level of communication and interaction between local government and the local community;
- provide a community leadership and economic development role (particularly in regional areas); and
- provide the ability to work more effectively across levels of government in delivering coordinated 'whole of government' services at the local level.

This submission draws on that position and while submissions from councils and state and territory local government associations may provide details and examples of specific applications, ALGA will highlight just a few examples aimed at demonstrating how councils have embraced information and communications technology to improve local government's services to its citizens.

As the Government proceeds with the NBN, capitalising on the investment in broadband technology is critical to all Australians. One of the major potential benefits of high-quality, reliable and affordable broadband will be the ability of all residents to conduct e-business with the private sector and government, including local government.

The critical importance of reliable, accessible and affordable high speed broadband infrastructure to the national economy and the economic and social wellbeing of Australians has been detailed extensively by National Economics in the *State of the Regions* reports commissioned by ALGA. The 2007-08 *State of the Regions* report estimated that \$3.2 billion and 33,000 jobs had been lost to Australian businesses in the preceding 12 months due to inadequate broadband infrastructure. These conclusions were reiterated in the subsequent 2008-09 *State of the Regions* report and National Economics stated that Australia's knowledge economy continued to be shackled by the lack of an equitable high speed broadband network.

The 2008-09 *State of the Regions* report points out the benefits of broadband to remote regions of Australia. For remote regions broadband is expected to be significant in reshaping the local economy, building skills and providing greater access to services, such as health and education, to those communities and individuals which currently have very limited access.

The Government has signalled a greater focus on regional development in the rollout and has asked NBN Co to ensure that fibre is built in regional areas as a priority. It has also encouraged NBN Co to explore mechanisms by which community inputs and advice on regional priorities can be facilitated in order to overcome the digital divide and improve the efficiency of the rollout. This regional focus is important in ensuring equal access to those communities.

The Government has given an undertaking to streamline and expedite the rollout which would result in the network being delivered sooner and at lower cost. Earlier access to the National Broadband Network will facilitate the growth in knowledge economy firms and government online services, potentially increasing the competitive position of firms, and in government services, result in cost savings through online service delivery.

The Commonwealth and NBN Co have consulted with ALGA on the implementation of the rollout. Ongoing consultation and partnership is important to ensure an effective rollout. This will allow consideration of the different circumstances of

communities across the country, as well as responding to and resolving individual issues at an earlier stage. ALGA has prepared a set of guiding principles for the rollout of the National Broadband Network which stress the importance of consulting with local communities, and has acknowledged that the Government and NBN Co have been working in the spirit of the principles already. The principles are attached to this submission. **(Attachment A)**

The Australian Government has demonstrated a commitment to consult with the local government sector, and ALGA has welcomed the willingness of Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, to actively consult with local government on the NBN roll-out, including how to mandate broadband in greenfields sites. In the coming years, the rollout of NBN will impact upon almost every local government area in Australia.

ALGA was a member of the Online and Communications Council (OCC) and a number of working groups that support the OCC, including the National Broadband Development Group (NBDG). Through its membership of the NBDG, ALGA contributes local government views on the numerous policy issues being considered by government in relation to broadband. In addition, ALGA continues to contribute to broadband policy and related issues by lodging submissions to relevant Australian Government reviews and inquiries. In responding to the Committee's terms of reference, ALGA has sourced some examples from councils to demonstrate the initiatives at local government level and the benefits to communities. The timeframe of the inquiry did not allow comprehensive research or an audit of all local government initiatives.

### **Local government roles and opportunities**

In 2005–06 in its publication *Innovative Uses of Broadband by Local Government in Australia* ALGA highlighted examples of how councils recognise the potential of Broadband to their council and community and also provided examples of how local government has been involved in many different areas of broadband including:

- establishing regional community telcos;
- using broadband to share back office systems or provide access to Application Service Provider solutions at the whole of state or territory level;
- obtaining funding for broadband infrastructure rollout by helping develop a business case for obtaining broadband for their communities;
- participating in partnerships with other councils, regional development boards, health and education agencies to obtain broadband;
- developing strategic visions for their council or region which identifies obtaining broadband as an essential element in their economic development; and
- developing innovative approaches to regulating the rollout of broadband in 'greenfield estates'.

Access to affordable and reliable broadband services creates significant opportunities for local government and local communities. Opportunities include:

- the delivery of local government services via the internet;
- joined up government services;
- facilitation of business networks and services to support local and regional development; and
- social and community benefits.

#### The delivery of government services via the internet

Many councils already offer a range of internet-based services. Partnerships between local government and other agencies are providing shared platforms of data and services. Large amounts of regional data can be made available through Internet and online services to enable councils with limited resources to share data for the benefit of their communities. Internet-based services will increasingly become the first port of call for residents, taking pressure off frontline council resources.

Greater access to electronic services will benefit communities and businesses through more efficient, accessible and less costly services. However, many smaller councils will require assistance to improve their internal administration processes as a prerequisite to being able to deliver effective online systems.

Internet services will be particularly important for remote communities with geographically dispersed communities. Delivering online services will enable business to be conducted without the need to travel great distances and to generate enormous cost savings and time efficiencies. Used as part of the community consultation process, online consultation will streamline the timeframe for consultation and allow greater interaction with the community.

#### Example: Shared services (cloud) for delivery of government services.

Over 40 Victorian councils have joined a collaborative shared ICT service platform project that will improve their collective ability to deliver services. The fragmented nature of the local government sector currently inhibits councils' ability to collaborate and leverage their collective capability. Every council's systems, business processes, data management and reporting are different. The first step is to implement a common system with common business processes and data structures through investing in a modern ICT platform built on a broadband network that can be shared by all participants and accessed anywhere in the state.

Councils have recognised that through collaboration they can substantially improve service delivery. They will use their collective capability to create innovative changes that none of them would be capable of achieving on their own, including:

- providing customers with better access to council services, using a variety of modern communication channels;
- improving the efficiency and responsiveness of field officers (eg environmental health officers, maternal and child health nurses, municipal building inspectors) by providing access to their data anywhere at any time and forwarding work requests to them while in the field avoiding wasted journeys to and from council offices;
- collaborating more easily on the establishment of regional centres of excellence eg regional asset management services that are able to deliver improved contract and materials management, uniform condition monitoring, deployment of advanced maintenance and renewal programs that enable councils to achieve between 15% and 30% improvement on their capital works program;
- efficiently managing the collective procurement of goods and services, which has the potential to deliver significant savings across multiple spend categories;
- providing much better reporting and public accountability for the delivery of community outcomes; and
- improving the interface between local government and state and federal governments as well as business and the local government.

The outcomes of a national broadband network are key enablers that will allow councils to transform the way services are delivered to their communities. Without such capability each council is constrained to building and maintaining its own communication and technology infrastructure that significantly diminishes the opportunity to deliver reform and innovation through collaboration. Around 12 councils are now ready to implement the shared ICT service and are planning to go live with the first service on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011.

The ICT shared service using the broadband network is the starting point, providing a foundation for many other initiatives. Major benefits are expected to accrue when councils leverage the capability of the common platform and modern ICT applications to engage in collaborative reform programs around procurement, asset management and customer service programs.

Rural councils, in particular, are very quick to see the benefits of such a program. It delivers outcomes that they aspire to, but which would normally be beyond their means. However, a major risk for many of these communities is the availability, reliability and affordability of the broadband service over which the shared service operates. The network needs to deliver capacity to run all aspects of council business; reliability to be able to provide year round service and does not have a single point of failure; and competitive pricing so that it does not discriminate based on location (currently rural broadband prices are around 4 times metropolitan prices).

Example: South West Knowledge Hub – Colac Otway Shire Council.

The South West Knowledge Hub is a shared platform for councils, catchment management authorities and government agencies enabling authorities, departments and landowners to access Geographical Information System (GIS) and other regional data. A number of other south west Victorian councils have shown interest in using the GIS platform. The platform was developed by Colac Otway Shire Council in collaboration with Ballarat University and Corangamite Catchment Authority. The Hub is an example of smaller councils with limited resources sharing data to benefit the community. Promoting the Hub as a first point of contact for information on many local services and natural resources (eg. groundwater bores, landslides), saves time and resources within the council. The technology is based on open source software and the potential for data inclusion is limitless.

Example: next generation community services – Towong Shire Council.

One of regional Victoria's smallest budget councils is delivering broadband access at prices equivalent to those in metropolitan areas. Towong Shire has a challenging topography and limited resources, but wants to provide broadband to all the villages in the shire which are spread over 6500 square kilometres. The first part of the project is to deliver high speed wireless broadband to the rural township of Tallangatta. A business partner was identified to install a backhaul to connect to Albury, a repeater site which uses wind and solar power was installed and wireless mesh was installed throughout the town. It allows wireless access around town and has had minimal impact on the landscape and lowest power consumption due to the wind and solar power. The community is better engaged, council can deliver more online services, field staff can access records off-site and it has led to a new level of competitiveness in Towong. Education has improved as schools have their own virtual private network and agricultural development projects are expected to rise. The council also expects greater business viability, tourism and social economic benefits as it rolls out its wireless broadband infrastructure through the shire.

Example: Local-e shared content management system.

Local-e is a shared content management system (external websites) specifically designed for Local Government in NSW and coordinated by the Local Government and Shires Association of NSW. Currently, Local-e is being rebuilt on an open

source platform to enable NSW councils to move into the future and all the possibilities that the NBN brings.

Adherence to standards is at the forefront of the rebuild with the latest accessibility and Government Information Public Access (GIPA) guidelines built in to the new system. Councils will have more options than ever to enable them to utilise the best of the web for their communities. Completion of the project is due in July 2011

Utilising a shared content management system means that regional and rural councils in NSW are able to benefit from economies of scale, both in management of infrastructure as well as software development. This means everyone benefits without huge investment.

By using the best of breed open source technology, councils are ideally placed to be able to take advantage of the benefits of the NBN. These include:

- the ability to scale up rapidly: e.g. if a council wants to create multiple community service or campaign websites, it can be done cheaply and very quickly;
- ready for intensive applications: for many councils online services have not been possible due to the lack of decent infrastructure. Our sites will allow all kinds of bandwidth intensive applications to be used in these sites without huge financial or technical investment;
- increased community engagement: with communities having better access to bandwidth, councils will be able to use this cheap technology to allow greater participation: and
- innovation: councils better able to use technology in new and interesting ways.

#### Joined-up government services

Interoperability and interconnectivity between all government agencies delivers benefits to all levels of government. Approval and applications requiring interaction between more than one level of government can be expedited, and an important characteristic of an internet-based applications process is that approvals can be referred more quickly to relevant state and federal agencies and can be tracked throughout the process. Planning and development applications is an area of great potential for local government to increase efficiencies and reduce timeframes.

Local government can help enhance Australia's productivity and overall sustainability through administering an efficient development assessment planning system, and contributing to integrated strategic planning. Some progress has already been achieved by the sector through initial Australian Government funding to support electronic development assessment (eDA). This is a new generation of council service, which shows the importance local government places in the power and

ability of a strong information technology network across the country. Enhanced eDA capability can deliver considerable savings to business, government and applicants and reduce development timeframe and paperwork.

Additional support for local government and a partnership approach between all levels of government would greatly increase the networking capability between all government agencies. Savings could be generated by increased online lodgement of e-government services. Experience overseas indicates that the greater transparency inherent in online processes has reduced the potential for fraud and corruption, in addition to the savings through reduced administration costs. The benefits of e-government applications can include cutting costs and improving processes and information flow; but one of its primary aims is to improve customer service for citizens

Example: NSW Electronic Housing Code (eDA/EHC).

The NSW eDA project – also referred to as the Electronic Housing Code pilot project – will develop and demonstrate a shared, integrated platform for end-to-end processing of complying development applications under the NSW Housing Code. Use of Code-based applications provides a fast-track approval process for housing and minor alterations and additions. This contributes to housing affordability through time and cost savings by reducing the resources needed to prepare, monitor and evaluate proposals, and holding costs through faster processing and approval times.

Twelve Role Model Councils have been selected to participate in the pilot project. This group will be the focus for fast-tracking eDA service delivery in priority areas, while developing leading practice models for all councils to follow over time. A select group of private accredited certifiers is also involved in the pilot project.

The pilot project, and the associated systems and processes, will be developed so that in future it may be expanded in two directions:

1. Extend take-up of the electronic Housing Code component to other Councils across NSW, and
2. Extend the use of the system to other eDA processes once capacity reaches sustainable levels in key stakeholder areas, especially state agencies.

Enormous advances in health have seen increased life expectancies, improved technology and improved lifestyles. An increasingly important focus of the health debate is on preventative health and healthy lifestyles to reduce the burden of public health systems. Incorporating active living principles into the built environment is an innovative web-based application to achieve better health outcomes.

### Example: Healthy Spaces and Places

Web-based national planning guidelines have been developed to promote the health benefits of designing a built environment which promotes an active lifestyle. Aimed at built environment professionals, the guidelines are a result of a unique partnership between health, local government and planning peak bodies. The project has received funding support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

The project provides guidance to planners, developers and decision makers on how to incorporate active living principles into the built environment. The way streets, neighbourhoods, towns and cities are planned, designed and built affects the nature of, and the extent to which people can and do use these places. Research shows that regular physical activity can not only reduce the risk of chronic disease but also improve people's mental health and wellbeing and engenders a sense of belonging in the community.

The aim is to improve the understanding of how the built environment influences active living by ensuring that the built environments are planned to enhance the community's health and wellbeing. The NBN has the potential to expand people's access to these practical design solutions.

### Regional economic growth and employment

Local government's role in regional development varies depending upon the capacity and resources of individual council. However, in general, local government's role in regional and economic development includes:

- effective strategic planning and coordination;
- streamlining controls on job generating development;
- supporting local business;
- providing essential infrastructure and services, including through joint ventures;
- identifying investment opportunities;
- promoting tourism; and
- promoting cultural and recreational resources as an incentive for regional investment.

Local government has argued the need for affordable high speed broadband as key infrastructure for local communities and / or regions.

The agreement between the ALP and the Regional Independents is very important for regional Australia and the Government's undertaking to roll out broadband in regional areas as a priority is important to the economic potential of these regions. The potential of broadband to remote regions of Australia is expected to be

significant in reshaping the local economy, building skills and providing greater access to services such as health and education.

The 2007-08 *State of the Regions* report cites ABS data showing that the more remote the community, the lower level of broadband connections. This raises not only the issue of equity, but how more remote communities are provided with internet access and how communities develop the skills which will allow them to benefit from the use of the internet. Indigenous communities are particularly disadvantaged, with access decreasing as remoteness increases. Similarly, there is a direct link between inferior internet access and unemployment.

Communications infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth by enabling intensification of the networked economy – linking customers and firms in increasingly integrated chains and innovation capacity. High quality communication infrastructure is particularly important in Australia because the nation's regional industrial bases are often great distances from each other.

High quality broadband facilitates the establishment of high technology clusters of activity, which drive innovation through information sharing. As a regional policy objective, the development and encouragement of such high tech clusters is an important mechanism in supporting and improving industry output. The potential benefits of the development of high tech innovation clusters are improving planning; value-adding to business; strengthening regional competitiveness; and encouraging innovation.

Example: [Bendigo Community Telco \(BCT\): towards a high tech cluster.](#)

BCT began operations in 2000 and was the first telecommunications organisation of its kind in Australia. In addition to creating the ability to provide better services, improved community access, more value-added services and enhanced regional competitiveness, benefits to the community include: increased economic development; higher prosperity for the region; diversified employment opportunities; creation of new jobs (particularly in IT); enhanced distance education and other educational programs; reduction of the brain drain to larger centres; improved health care and social program delivery; significant efficiencies achieved by government; business productivity improvement; and opportunities to competitively access markets outside the region. (more information on community-owned telcos can be found in *Innovative uses of Broadband by Local Government in Australia (ALGA 2006)*).

Example: [The Shiny Halo Blog](#)

The Shiny Halo blog <http://centroc.com.au/shinyhalo/> developed by CENTROC (Central NSW ROC) is an example of how the internet can be used to engage the community and help generate actions towards resilience and sustainability in regional NSW. It recently won a highly commended award at the LGSA Environment Awards.

The Centroc Shiny Halo rewards action in mitigation and adaptation to climate change with tree planting across 17 small to medium-sized councils in Central NSW. Funded through the NSW Environmental Trust Program, the Shiny Halo program integrates community and council action. It showcases positive action in sustainability and resilience in Central NSW and includes a blog set up as part of the Centroc website. It promotes the actions of the Draft Options Paper for a Regional Resilience Strategy (a NSW Government funded initiative under the Urban Sustainability Program) and includes a news story with examples of action from each sector to be included each week, enabling people to share information and comment on it.

Example: The East Arnhem Shire has established a network of smart boards which are used for meetings and training. They are however not utilised as extensively as they could be due to lack of access to high speed internet. The issue in the NT is the cost of accessing the fibre network outside the target areas resulting in councils not being able to afford to connect remote communities to the NBN (Satellite is too expensive, considering the downloads envisaged ).

A number of councils, such as Brisbane City Council, provide consulting services to other bodies and councils. The expertise of local councils in Australia in environmental health, planning, engineering can be offered to developing councils. Broadband would facilitate export of these services. Improved telecommunications infrastructure provides opportunities for regional providers in education to develop education services in international markets.

Opportunities for e-health and e-education are particularly important in regional and remote areas. The size of Australia and its low population density in rural and regional areas, makes remote education services an attractive and cost effective education option. E-learning is also becoming increasingly important in training health professionals in remote areas and universities are adopting e-learning solutions in an effort to lower costs and provide training and education to a wider audience. It is expected that technology advancements will be made in this area.

Similarly e-health in rural and regional areas creates an avenue to provide web-based services for consumers which can assist in early diagnosis of disease and post-treatment patient monitoring services. Applications in aged care and community care will provide more options for those communities.

#### Facilitating social and community benefits

Broadband has great potential to assist in reducing social isolation. As broadband technologies become more affordable, an increasing number of older Australians will be able to access the internet. Although social isolation is not limited to older people, they form the greatest proportion of those who are classed as socially

isolated. Older people in rural and remote areas and those who have mobility restrictions, through age or disability, are particularly at risk of social isolation. Access to the internet provides opportunities for learning, stimulation and contact.

Older Australians are becoming more connected. Of all age groups, the largest increase in use of the internet is by people aged 65-74 years (ABS 2008, Australian Social Trends) Most emerging technologies for older people focus on assistive health technology such as home monitoring systems, tools for managing medical conditions, and technologies to compensate for physical and cognitive deterioration. However, there is great potential for “gerotechnology” to address the broader issue of social connectedness. There is an opportunity for the development of interactive technologies to specifically address social isolation. This must be accompanied by education and training opportunities to overcome the reluctance of many older people to use new technologies. Products specifically designed for older people could target the most isolated and at risk groups.

## **Conclusion**

ALGA has advocated the national roll out of broadband to all Australians and that it should be equitably delivered and affordably priced. Broadband is a key enabler of services and has the potential to deliver a range of benefits to governments, the national economy and the economic and social welfare of our communities. National broadband will enable councils to transform the way they provide services to their communities. The ability to provide services electronically and to develop shared services and data will result in cost efficiencies, increased accessibility and reduced timeframes. Where more than one level of government is involved in an application or approvals process, broadband will mean increased efficiency, reduced timeframes and the ability for all parties to track the process.

Internet services will be particularly important for remote communities and communities where the population is dispersed over a wide geographic area. It will enable businesses in these communities to increase their competitiveness in national and international markets. In these regions broadband has the potential to build the local economy, increase skills and employment, and provide greater access to services such as health and education. However, it is critically important that broadband is affordable in these regional areas.

To optimise the opportunities broadband can offer, particularly in rural and regional areas, there is a need to assist councils and communities to develop skills and gain access to support services. Many smaller councils will need assistance to re-engineer their ‘back of office’ systems as a prerequisite for them to be able to deliver effective online services. Financial, technical and training support will be required to assist those councils to utilise the benefits of broadband. Work by ALGA and state and territory local government associations on the financial sustainability of councils, demonstrate that many of these councils face significant financial challenges and

therefore consideration should be given to effective ways to support these councils, including additional funding to support their work.

For further information in relation to any of the matters raised in this submission, please contact Monica Telesny on 61229433 or email [monica.telesny@alqa.asn.au](mailto:monica.telesny@alqa.asn.au).

## Attachment 1

8 July 2010

Dear Minister

### **National Broadband Network**

At last month's 2010 National General Assembly of Local Government, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) released a set of guiding principles for the engagement of local government in the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN).

The principles stress the importance of the Australian Government and NBN Co consulting with local communities during the NBN rollout to ensure the successful implementation of the network.

The principles were drafted by ALGA in collaboration with its member associations and acknowledge that there is already a good level of adherence to the principles. The purpose of the principles is to ensure that ongoing consultation with local communities continues throughout the NBN rollout period.

A copy of the principles is attached for your reference and information. A copy has also been provided to NBN Co and to your Department.

Geoff Lake

## **Principles for the engagement of local government in the NBN**

### **1. Context/Introduction to the principles**

Local government considers that all Australians should have access to reliable, affordable and high-speed broadband and therefore supports the objectives underlying the Australian Government's National Broadband Network (NBN) initiative, including that the NBN operate as a wholesale open access network.

However, in practice, the NBN will require significant co-ordination and co-operation between all levels of government, entities established by the Australian Government to fulfil the NBN objectives (such as NBN Co. and NBN Co (Tas)) and those carrying out the works, in order to deliver the NBN effectively and efficiently for all communities. It is estimated that some 4,000 to 5,000 homes per day around the nation will be connected to the NBN when the roll-out is fully under way.

Local government is uniquely positioned to represent the interests of all members of regional and local communities across Australia in relation to the build and roll-out of the NBN, and can play an important advocacy role in encouraging the use and take-up of, the NBN, consistent with the Online & Communications Council Framework agreed to by all levels of government in December 2008. Local government seeks to advance these interests nationally through the principles contained in this document.

The principles are deliberately objectives-based and broadly cover the themes of: resourcing and capacity of local government; and the importance of consultation with local government. They do not attempt to canvass technical implementation or operational aspects of the NBN.

It is acknowledged that the Australian Government and NBN Co. are observing the spirit of these principles in large part already. Local government welcomes the existing level of consultation and goodwill displayed to date by NBN Co. in the five mainland trial sites, and further welcomes the commitment by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to work constructively and co-operatively with local government.

The principles are put forward by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) as the national voice of Australia's local and regional councils. They are a 'living' set of principles and will be revised as the NBN roll-out evolves. They have been prepared in conjunction with ALGA's member associations and were endorsed by the ALGA Board on 14 June 2010.

## 2. Principles

**Resourcing and capacity: Local government calls on the Australian Government and relevant bodies, in particular NBN Co., to consult affected local government authorities prior to and during the NBN build and construction in the specific Local Government Area, and ensure they are supported to answer queries from the public about the NBN**

Local government must be provided with the capacity supports that enable it to facilitate the roll-out as well as handle queries about the NBN in their Local Government Area. This includes that:

- Affected councils must be provided with key information regarding the timing, location and operational requirements of each phase of the roll-out, sufficiently in advance of work commencing so that council can support and facilitate the roll-out. By doing this, local and regional councils will also be able to help inform communities of disruptions to services and utilities so that citizens can plan around the roll-out.
  - Engaging with councils on design guidelines at the earliest stage possible should also occur.
- Flexible business models for the implementation must be provided for, noting that a variety of ownership arrangements exist and that some councils already own and operate broadband networks and have placed significant investment in the infrastructure in order to meet the demands and expectations of their communities.
- Any communications strategy in relation to the NBN must ensure that the public can understand and appreciate the role of councils in respect of the NBN, compared to other stakeholders.
- Educational tools, either in the form of guidelines or national specifications, would be very helpful particularly to industry and decision-making authorities such as local government. New requirements for planning and development can create a level of confusion as to exactly what is sufficient to meet the new requirements. As a result, there is a steep learning curve that takes place with each change, in the preparation of applications by developers, that then must be assessed by local governments. An educational tool developed by the Australian Government, in consultation with ALGA and its member associations, would help smooth that adjustment.

## **Local government is an end-user of the NBN: Recognition of business ‘use of the network’ and the role of local government (both intergovernmental and vis-à-vis community members)**

Local government should be included in discussions with other levels of government and other stakeholders in the consideration of service delivery and/or other business opportunities arising from the rollout of the NBN network.

### **Preservation of existing land reserves especially road reserves**

***Importance of maintaining road reserves given remnant and urban vegetation and the need to ensure the natural and urban environment is adequately protected***

Road reserves often contain critically important urban canopy which is not easily replaced therefore there is a need for any proposed removal/pruning of trees or clearing of vegetation as a result of access to the road reserve to be clearly outlined in land access notices so that the impact on the environment and urban amenity can be assessed prior to any work being undertaken.

***Consult with local government on proposed design and construction standards to manage the impacts on community assets***

Local government has vast experience and an intimate knowledge of the road reserve and the various valuable assets located within it, as well as public open spaces. Local government should be consulted on proposed design and construction standards for infrastructure that will be placed in, on, or above the road reserve or public open space for which it is the authority.

***Councils must be provided with land access notices and there must be proper information exchange between councils and contractors engaged by carriers***

Before any work is undertaken on a road reserve or public open space a land access notification must be presented to the road authority setting out where and when the work is to be undertaken, the safety requirements that will be put in place to protect the workers and the public e.g. traffic and pedestrian control systems.

One of the biggest difficulties for road authorities is dealing with contractors engaged by telecommunications carriers.

Contractors need to be provided with precise information in relation to their role and responsibilities to road authorities and adjacent property owners before they are allowed to access the road reserve. Their responsibilities are to include the preservation of assets and the restoration of any damaged property.

### **Co-ordination of NBN works with those of other public utilities**

Installation, upgrade and maintenance of public works must be co-ordinated with the roll-out of the NBN, and vice-versa.

#### ***Installation of cables should conform with relevant state and local planning laws***

Installation of fibre must conform with local government and state government planning laws and local planning controls regarding overheading or undergrounding of cables, whilst retaining flexibility to respond to issues affecting each Local Government Area.

Given the impact that overhead cables can have on local amenity including streetscape, clear, consistent and transparent policies for the installation of overhead and underground Fibre-to-the-Premises infrastructure are fundamental and should encompass:

- Continuation of current state or local government underground cabling policies or schemes to maintain local amenity including a hierarchy of options enabling the preservation of the urban canopy;
- Timely, appropriate and informed consultation with local government;
- Undergrounding cables in areas prone to natural hazards or other climactic vulnerability;
- Integration with existing Commonwealth and state planning policies and guidelines; and
- The definition, and infrastructure requirements of, greenfields estates.

#### ***Requirements regarding 'fibre ready' compared to fibre installation should be made clear***

Local government understands that the Commonwealth legislation will mandate fibre in greenfields except in certain circumstances set down in regulations/instruments, in which case the greenfields must generally be 'fibre ready'. Local councils must have sufficient information to know and understand, as a key planning approval authority, how to distinguish the two requirements and ensure that 'fibre ready' installation is not used by carriers in a way that contravenes the Commonwealth's objectives.

## **Costs and funding**

Given the nature of works likely to be associated with the roll-out of the NBN, compensation to councils for reparatory works will be needed as a contingency measure to guard against any adverse impacts on council revenues particularly in regional and remote areas.

## **Ensuring rural and regional communities do not get left behind**

The NBN should deliver high-speed affordable reliable access to all communities including those in regional, rural and remote Australia. Consistent service across all regions is a fundamental objective.

Cable and wireless technologies should be extended as far as possible but reliance on satellite technology should not be the default position in the more regional and remote areas of Australia.

The NBN Co. should be the sole body responsible for the whole NBN network inclusive of fibre, wireless and satellite services which will ensure consistent service delivery to regional, rural and remote communities and avoid the considerable uncertainties that would occur if the non-fibre components were not included in the scope of the NBN Co.