



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Ms Felicity-Ann Lewis
Mayor of Marion
Chair, National General Assembly
President, Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

13 JAN 2014

Broadband and mobile reception in regional Australia

Dear Mayor Lewis

I refer to your letter dated 21 October 2013 concerning broadband access and mobile phone reception in regional and remote Australia.

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding. NBN Co is in a period of significant change and with the Strategic Review having now been released I am able to provide you with up to date information.

I recognise the importance of the Australian Local Government Association in representing the many local councils across Australia and appreciate you bringing these resolutions to my attention. I have addressed the resolutions below:

Resolution Number: 44

That the Australian Local Government Association calls on the Federal Government to re-focus the National Broadband Network and target Government Infrastructure including local government to connect Council assets and improve communications within Local Government areas.

Resolution Number: 44.1

That the National General Assembly call on the Minister for Communications to support the provision of broadband to all rural and remote schools with at least mobile connectivity.

The Australian Government is committed to completing the construction of the National Broadband Network (NBN) and in doing so ensure that all Australians have access to very fast broadband as soon, as cost-effectively and as affordably as possible.

Unfortunately the previous Labor Government manifestly failed to meet its promises in relation to the NBN. The Strategic Review identified that completing the NBN under Labor's plan would cost \$73 billion (\$29 billion more than we were told), increase prices for consumers by up to 80 per cent and not be complete until 2024. We face a significant task in getting the NBN back on track.

NBN Co has advised the Government that to deliver fast broadband sooner, at less cost to taxpayers and more affordably for consumers, the NBN should be completed using a multi-technology mix. This will match the right technology to the right location and make use of existing networks where possible to deliver very fast broadband.

This is forecast to save taxpayers \$32 billion, get the NBN finished four years sooner and to enable nine out of ten Australians to get access to download speeds of 50 megabits per second or more by 2019.

In coming months, the Government will be undertaking further reviews into the NBN to refocus the rollout around the policy objectives identified in the Strategic Review to connect homes and businesses to the network sooner.

The Government has asked NBN Co to complete construction in areas where construction contracts have been signed and where detailed design work is underway. However, in areas where work has not commenced, decisions about actual construction in these areas will be taken on the basis of review findings.

Currently, up to one and a half million households and businesses across Australia are in areas that have no or limited access to fixed-line broadband. The Government believes that the suburbs, regions, towns and business districts with the poorest services have the greatest need for the technological upgrade that the NBN rollout will deliver. The Government will therefore require NBN Co to amend the rollout plan to give priority to the identified inadequately served areas where logistically and commercially feasible.

As a priority, the Department of Communications, with the assistance of NBN Co and private carriers, will provide Parliament with a ranking of broadband quality and availability in all areas of Australia. This ranking will be published for comment and review and will guide future prioritisation of the rollout.

Following these reviews, more specific information will be made available at www.nbnco.com.au

Resolution Number: 58

That the National General Assembly calls on the Federal Government to make additional funding available for mobile telephone and data services in regional areas, based on:

- *Economic benefit to agriculture*
- *Emergency management requirements eg fire and flood*
- *Tourism activities*

The Government recognises the importance of reliable mobile coverage to Australians. While mobile phone carriers provide coverage to 99 per cent of Australia's population, there are still some areas that have no coverage, particularly in regional and remote locations.

Expanding mobile coverage has clear economic and social benefits, as well as public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas.

The Government is investing \$100 million in a Mobile Coverage Programme that will provide mobile phone coverage to some outer metropolitan, regional and remote communities which do not currently have reliable mobile service. The Government's \$100 million investment is expected to generate at least matching funding from local and state governments, communities and industry.

Funding of \$80 million will be provided under the Mobile Network Expansion Project to improve mobile phone coverage along major transport routes, in small communities and in locations prone to natural disasters. An additional \$20 million will be provided under the Mobile Black Spots Project to address unique mobile coverage problems.

The Government has released a public discussion paper which outlines possible implementation models for delivering the program. All interested stakeholders wishing to have their views about the program considered by Government are invited to provide a submission to the Department of Communications by Friday 28 February 2014. Please visit www.communications.gov.au/mobile_services/mobile_coverage_programme for further information.

Thank you for bringing these resolutions to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Turnbull