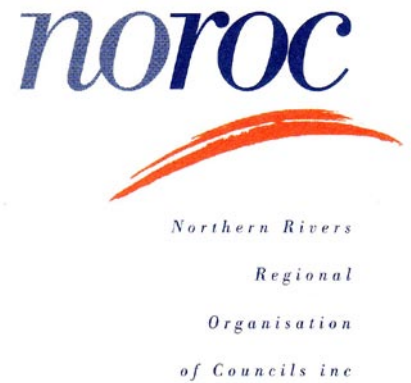


27 March 2008

**Ms Patricia Scott**  
**Chair - National Broadband Network Panel of Experts**  
**Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**  
**GPO Box 2154**  
**CANBERRA ACT 2601**



## **SUBMISSION RE NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK**

Dear Ms Scott,

Councils in the Northern Rivers of NSW congratulate the Federal Government on its intention to establish a National Broadband Network – and look forward eagerly to its rollout over coming years.

NOROC represents local government in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, and covers a population of approximately 280,000 people.

Access to telecommunications in our community is becoming increasingly important as the years pass.

In terms of the specifics of the intended 'Request for Proposals to build a National Broadband Network', our communities suggest the following points should form part of the proposal brief put to the private sector:

### **Ability of the successful Provider to co-operate with an Ongoing Independent Audit Process.**

In the past, our communities have been left in the dark about the adequacy or otherwise of telecommunications system compared to metropolitan areas. As the National Broadband Network is rolled out, an independent audit process, complete with appropriate service guarantees and project milestones, ought form part of the process.

It has been a matter of some discomfort for our community that we have not been in a position to be sure about the adequacy of our telecommunications infrastructure compared to metropolitan areas, but must rely continually on the often self-serving assurances of a number of providers.

Our communities ought to be in a position to independently assess the standard of telecommunications and inform the Government, rather than accept at face-value the assurances of various private-enterprise telecommunications providers, which of course invariably assure us that their service provision is first-rate.

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It is suggested that one way this may be achieved is by increasing resources for the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, or similar organisation/process, to allow such an audit, report on progress of the Network rollout, and assist consumers with difficulties.

### **Ability of Network Providers to include Training for Rural and Regional Areas**

While the National Broadband Network proposal is welcomed, our councils are keen to ensure that ongoing expenditure is made part of the rollout process to educate regional and rural communities on the use of broadband and related new technologies.

NOROC suggests that funds be allocated for the specific purpose of providing training for rural and regional communities to use new information technology.

### **Ability to Provide Ongoing Network Investment and Upgrading**


Our Councils suggest that a 'Future Watch' component is made part of the National Broadband Network, which would consist of programmes to ensure that regions do not fall behind in the availability of, and access to, new technologies.

It would be a great tragedy if a National Broadband Network were constructed but insufficient investment provision was made in its continuing improvement.

To that end, a **perpetual fund that allows rural and regional communities to access resources for the upgrading of the network in the future** is crucial to ensure that country areas do not fall further behind metropolitan areas when it comes to provision of broadband services.

Finally, I wish to once again to commend the Government on its initiative in establishing a National Broadband Network.

Yours faithfully,



**Cr Ernie Bennett**  
**President – NOROC**  
**Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils**