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I am responding to the open invitation by Senator Stephen Conroy to provide submissions that will inform the development of the National Broadband Network by 30th March.

I operate an IT sales and services business in a rural region just to the west of Brisbane and have been a constructive activist for improved Broadband services in my area since 2003.

Areas of the newly formed Somerset Region and Lockyer Valley Region fall within the development zones designated by the Queensland State Government, 'South-East Queensland Development Plan'.

It is predicted that the population of some local towns in Somerset Region will more than double in the next two years, with substantial areas of land already being cleared for housing development and a shopping centre.

We have seen an enormous improvement in Internet services within our region since 2003, but the current situation can scarcely be described as World Class.

Although ADSL is now available in many local exchanges, the 4.5 km distance limit and the use of RIMS to increase the capacity of the telephone network has left many hundreds, if not thousands, of local people without access to the service. Furthermore, some exchanges have run out of ports, so no new customers can be connected to them for the foreseeable future.

There are two wireless broadband providers with local transmitters that could fill many of the gaps. There used to be a subsidy available to cover the installation costs, but the previous Federal Government did not include them in the new Australian Broadband Guarantee program.

There is a subsidy for satellite Broadband, but we now have the absurd situation that the Federal Government 'Australian Broadband Guarantee' program is paying a subsidy of \$2750 to people who live right under the local wireless Broadband transmitters that could provide a better service at less cost to the tax-payer.

Telstra Next G Broadband is available in the region, but it is a premium service at a premium price.

I would like to submit that with the rapidly increasing population growth in our region NOW is the time to install a fibre-optic cable network to reach the majority of homes and businesses (FTTP).

Whilst there are other possible solutions such as Wi-Max wireless broadband, FTTP is the only technology that can guarantee service delivery to every premises.

Furthermore, an alternative telecommunications infrastructure would provide genuine competition to the existing, Telstra owned copper wire network.

I have been watching the debate about the best way forward for the National Broadband Network with some interest. There seems to be a lot of support for the idea of introducing legislation to force Telstra to separate the wholesale and retail parts of the business to break their virtual monopoly. Clearly Telstra would resist this proposal vigorously.

From the perspective of consumers, I believe that building a wholesale fibre optic network that is entirely independent of any current telecommunications company in Australia would be an intelligent way to achieve the objective of improved competition in the telecommunications marketplace, whilst neatly sidestepping the need for any legislation to divide Telstra.

In addition, it seems like common sense to require developers to install the infrastructure for fibre optic broadband at the same time as installing other services in any new housing developments.

In my experience, local consumers are not so much concerned about higher speeds – what they really want is the ability to connect to a reliable and affordable Broadband service.

Thank you.

Paul Heymans