2011–12 Regional Telecommunications Review

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Regional Telecommunications
Independent Review Committee

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Australian Government
Regional Telecommunications Review

Key issues

- NBN and the Australian Digital Economy

- Mobile communications

- Consumer experiences

- Telecommunications and Indigenous Australians

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Regional Australia and the Digital Economy

- Genuine desire across regional Australia for access to faster, more affordable and more reliable broadband services.

- The digital economy involves harnessing widespread broadband to improve the delivery of health, education and local government services, and growth in local economies.

Satellite Broadband

- Still uncertainty about what will be able to be achieved over the NBN Co satellite service.

- To help address this, we recommend that case studies should be developed to demonstrate the range of applications that can be used over satellite technology.

Digital Economy Planning

- A strategic approach to participating in the digital economy.

- People should not be waiting for the NBN rollout in their areas in order to participate in the digital economy.

Mobile Communications

- Considered essential for people to run businesses, to encourage tourism and growth, and to have reliable communications in emergency situations.

- The mobile phone coverage footprint is approaching, or has largely reached, the limits of commercial viability.

Extending Mobile Coverage

- The cost of deploying mobile base stations in rural and remote areas is high.

- Construction of towers in regional areas for the NBN's fixed wireless network presents an opportunity to improve mobile coverage.

- Recommend a co-investment program with an emphasis on priority regions selected with community input.

Consumer Issues

- Regional Australians have consumer issues that are much the same as those living in urban areas

  — customer service issues

  — problems with contacting service providers

  — problems with complaint-handling

  — lack of consumer awareness.

Consumer Safeguards

- In transitioning to the NBN environment, there are concerns about losing existing consumer safeguards.

- Safeguards encourage providers to:
    — supply reliable services quickly
    — restore faulty services promptly
    — address recurrent faults
    — provide quicker responses to people with life-threatening medical conditions.

Indigenous Communications

- Telecommunications can provide significant improvements to the economic social participation of Indigenous Australians.

- Key barriers include:
    1. limited access to good telecommunications services
    2. low levels of digital literacy.

Indigenous Communications Program

- Recommend the continuation of the Indigenous Communications Program.

- It should include tailored, localised training solutions and recognise the increasing use of mobile devices among Indigenous Australians.