

ATUG's Focus this week is on the Government's announcement on its plans to establish a new company to build and operate a new super fast national Broadband Network.

http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/022

National Broadband Network

The Government has announced it will establish a new company that will invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to build and operate a National Broadband Network delivering superfast broadband to Australian homes and workplaces.

http://www.dbcde.gov.au/communications_for_business/funding_programs_and_support/national_broadband_network

To turn its vision into action the Government will immediately:

- establish a company to build and operate the network and make an initial investment of \$4.7 billion in the network

- commence an implementation study to determine the company's operating arrangements, detailed network design and ways to attract private sector investment

- fast-track negotiations with the Tasmanian Government, as suggested by the Panel of Experts, to build upon its National Broadband Network proposal to begin the rollout of a FTTP network and next generation wireless services in Tasmania as early as July

- implement measures to address backhaul 'black spots' through the timely rollout of fibre optic transmission links connecting cities, major regional centres and rural towns - delivering improvements to telecommunication services in the short term

- progress legislative changes that will govern the national broadband network company and facilitate the rollout of FTTP networks, including requiring use of fibre optic technology in future greenfield developments, and

- commence a consultative process on necessary changes to the existing telecommunications regulatory regime.

The Government terminated the Request for Proposals (RFP) process on 7 April 2009, on the basis of advice from the independent Panel of Experts that none of the national proposals offered value for money. The Panel noted the rapid deterioration of the global economy had a significant impact on the process. Refer to the [extract from the evaluation report](#) for more information.

Regulatory Reform

The Government also announced a major review of the telecommunications regulatory regime

http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/021

The Rudd Government has released a Regulatory Reform discussion paper to seek public comment on ways to improve telecommunications regulations to make it work more effectively in the interest of consumers and businesses.

The existing regime needs to be reformed to improve competition and strengthen consumer safeguards, as well as remove redundant and inefficient red tape. A vibrant, competitive telecommunications sector is important for delivering lower prices, better quality and more innovative services for consumers and businesses.

"The Regulatory Reform paper I am releasing today seeks views on the options the Government will consider for reform of the existing regime to make it work more effectively, particularly during the rollout of the NBN", said the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy.

A wide range of stakeholders, including telecommunications carriers and consumer groups, have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the current regime.

The Regulatory Reform paper canvasses a range of options for reform, including:

- streamlining current regulatory processes, by allowing the ACCC to set up-front access terms for companies wanting access to Telstra and other networks;

- strengthening the powers of the ACCC to tackle anti-competitive conduct by allowing it to impose binding rule of conduct when issuing competition notices;

- promoting greater competition across the industry, including through measures to better address Telstra's vertical and horizontal integration, such as functional separation;

- addressing competition and investment issues arising from cross-ownership of fixed-line and cable networks, and telecommunications and media assets;

- improving universal access arrangements for telephony and payphones; and

- introducing more effective rules, requiring telephone companies to make connections and repairs within set time-frames.

The Government is seeking submissions by 3 June 2009, before making final decisions and introducing legislation into the Parliament.

The Government does not favour any specific reform option. It is, however committed to ensuring that the regulatory framework in this sector is effective **in promoting the long term interests of end-users**, without imposing any unnecessary burdens on business.

Copies of the Regulatory Reform discussion paper and further information on the enhanced National Broadband Network are available at www.dbcde.gov.au/nationalbroadbandnetwork

ATUG comments

ATUG welcomes the Commonwealth Government's vision for Australia's game changing National Broadband Network.

A high speed fibre link to 90% of Australian homes and workplaces plus an affordable mix of wireless and satellite to deliver 100% coverage will change the communications landscape for all end users.

An updated regulatory environment will provide a much needed boost to competition and to choice and confidence in the sector. A transparent process where all views can be considered and debated will produce better outcomes for the next phase in Australia's communications policy.

Clear and certain access and pricing rules, a strengthened role for the ACCC, new consumer protection arrangements and more effective separation between wholesale and retail units within Telstra are welcomed by ATUG.

ATUG congratulates the Tasmanian Government on its successful proposal. This will be a milestone project for the National Broadband Network.

The immediate attention to regional backhaul links between major centres will provide much needed accelerated regional broadband services. ATUG looks forward to early announcements for this project.

The commitment to fibre deployments in greenfields developments is also a very welcome next generation move into a fibre future.

ATUG has been focused on competition and innovation in communications and the benefits for end users since 1981. Today's announcements are historic - a truly wholesale, truly separate National Broadband Network, stronger competition and updated consumer protection for communications users.

The outcome for all users will be game changing capability for businesses large and small, government organisations and communities across Australia.

ATUG would welcome members' views - <http://www.atugblog.com.au/>
National Broadband Network

ATUG will be discussing the issues at Future Forum - Digital Economy Infrastructure and Access, Sydney 5th May and ATUG's 7th Annual Regional Communications Conference in Canberra 21-22 May.