

ATUG Focus this week is on the Minister's speech at ATUG 2009 which had some key messages about the NBN – although no announcement. The Minister's speech is at

<http://www.atug.com.au/ATUG2009/Presentations/StephenConroy.pdf>

ATUG was also pleased with the stance taken by the ACCC Chairman on a fair deal for end users. ATUG has been raising concerns about the difficulty end users face in driving market competitiveness through choice – poor information, misleading speed and coverage claims, broadband switching difficulties, inability to negotiate fair rates for roaming service, price increases eg per 30 second blocks and loss of rebate for call drop outs for mobiles. Mr Samuel's speech is at

<http://www.atug.com.au/ATUG2009/Presentations/GraemeSamuel.pdf>

ATUG's MDs speech is at

<http://www.atug.com.au/mediarelease/2009/OpeningRemarksATUG2009.pdf>

Back to the Minister, ATUG has summarised the speech and highlighted the comments of significance to our 2009 NBN Campaign to ensure the right outcomes for end users:

Representing the views and interests of telecommunications users - large and small - ATUG has played a vital role in the evolution of the current market environment.

It has contributed strongly to industry progress over the past two and a half decades.

It has consistently helped users by promoting choice and competition.

And, ATUG continues to advocate strongly and constructively for improvement in the emerging and next-generation environment.

The Government has a shared priority with ATUG to improve the availability, affordability and quality of communications services.

We share concerns in areas such as broadband access and pricing, encouraging investment and developing services in regional Australia.

One important campaign undertaken by ATUG in this area is its annual series of regional broadband forums.

In the last year the roadshow visited 14 regional centres across the country.

ATUG has visited some 70 regional communities since the establishment of its roadshow program in 2003.

This type of activity is important as we seek to accelerate broadband availability and awareness in regional Australia.

Despite challenges and the limitations of existing services, there are already strong signs that regional, rural and remote areas are benefiting from broadband.

The Yorke Peninsula in South Australia is a case in point.

In 2005, broadband arrived on the Yorke Peninsula.

A study produced two years afterwards, in 2007, estimated that broadband is currently delivering \$9.4 million in benefits annually.

Further investment through the National Broadband Network will ensure that similar stimulus is created in other parts of the country.

At the time of the last budget the Government announced that it was prepared to commit up to \$400 million to respond to the Regional Telecommunications Review, chaired by Dr Bill Glasson.

The Glasson Report urged the Government to invest between 10 and 15 per cent of the available funds in an initial response to recommendations.

The \$60 million package announced last week puts the Government's initial commitment at the upper end of that range.

Firstly, the Government has committed \$46 million in new funds to a new Digital Regions Initiative.

This program will focus on digital projects enabling improved education, health and emergency services in regional communities.

Draft guidelines for the Digital Regions Initiative will be released for comment in the coming months.

The Government has also committed \$11.4 million in new funds to increase and extend the Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme.

Under the improved conditions, the subsidy level has been increased to 85 per cent of the handset cost, up to a cap of \$1000.

Finally, the Government has committed an additional \$3.7 million new funding contribution to a \$30 million refocused Indigenous Communications Program.

Importantly, the Report also acknowledges the significance of the National Broadband Network for regional Australia.

Therefore the Government will revisit a number of recommendations that relate to the National Broadband Network once the outcome of the current process is finalised.

One of the most significant of these Report recommendations was the development of a **Customer Service Standard (CSS)**.

The committee recommended this include voice, broadband, mobile phone and payphone services.

The Report makes the point that consideration of a CSS involves substantial and complex changes to **existing regulatory arrangements, which will be significantly influenced by the NBN**.

It states that only once the outcome of the process is known will it be possible to plan and build infrastructure in the areas not served by the NBN.

As you will be aware, the **National Broadband Network** has the clear objective to reach 98 per cent of Australian homes and businesses.

Additionally, the Government has committed to improve and enhance services for the most remote 2 per cent of the country.

It is vital that we ensure that **all Australians have the opportunity to access improved broadband services on an equitable basis**.

As you will appreciate, the **Government is locked down, giving very close and careful consideration to the Panel of Experts' report on the five NBN proposals**.

This process is very much live and I am therefore highly restricted in what I can say.

What I can say, however, is that the **Government stands 100 per cent behind its election commitment to deliver the National Broadband Network**.

We will ensure that Australia reaps the **full competitive benefits that a national wholesale network can provide**.

You will be aware of much speculation in the media and probably here at the conference today on the possible timing and outcomes of the NBN process.

As I have said consistently, we have **an ambition to make an announcement by the end of March and, contingent on the complexity of the considerations, this remains the case**.

As I have said, it is important that we ensure that all Australians are able to benefit from the opportunities presented by the digital economy.

This is of **vital importance for people outside of major metropolitan centres, as it is for those inside our cities**.

Last month I had the pleasure of addressing a forum to examine the communications requirements of people with disabilities.

I announced at the time a feasibility study into the establishment of a new disability equipment program operating independent of telecommunications carriers.

The discussion paper is available from the Department's website.

It is therefore vital that we ensure that all Australians, no matter where they choose to live or work, or no matter what day-to-day challenges they face, have the ability to participate in this change.

The Rudd Government has a strong commitment to meeting this goal and to working with you all to ensure that Australia enjoys a prosperous and productive future in the digital economy.