

PAUL NEVILLE MP Federal Member for Hinkler MEDIA RELEASE

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Two Million Australians Left Behind In Rudd's Broadband Plan

Labor's National Broadband Network plan has raised serious questions about functionality, coverage and funding, according to Member for Hinkler and Chair of the Opposition's Communications Policy Committee Paul Neville.

Mr Neville said while the network plan had cherry-picked some of The Nationals' 2005 recommendations into future-proofing telecommunications services, it had failed to meet coverage requirements equivalent to the standard for fixed line and mobile telecommunications.

"Labor has taken up the National Party report's core principle of fibre optic being extended to outside capital cities, and talks about wireless broadband - which regional areas could already have if the OPEL proposal had been followed," he said.

"They then go on to talk about privately funded infrastructure in conjunction with Government. However, one would expect a market to provide heaps of competition in the capital city areas, so I am at a loss to understand why we would need to spend the profligate amount of \$43 billion to fund the scheme.

"How could such an expenditure ever break even, much less create a dividend? It is much like the Rudd Government's unlimited bank guarantee - reckless, over the top and an ongoing burden to taxpayers.

"Despite this, Labor's network will only reach 90 per cent of Australians, leaving more than 2 million Australians stranded with a lesser standard of operational speed, to say nothing of a seven to eight year installation date.

"Communications infrastructure is just as critical to the livelihood of the people outside metropolitan Australia as those in our cities. The Government has a social and moral obligation to ensure decent broadband services in regional areas - an obligation which it has failed to meet with its new plan. In fact, it even fails the 98 per cent coverage promise Labor made prior to the last election.

"Only 90 per cent of homes, schools and workplaces will have access to this optic fibre network, enjoying speeds of up to 100 megabits per second. Meanwhile, the other 2 million Australians will be left lagging with a system that only runs at 12 megabits per second."

"This will have a seriously negative effect on the productivity and efficiency of business and agriculture in regional areas, not to mention lifestyle considerations for people living outside the major cities."

Mr Neville is also concerned about the funding of the last 10 per cent of the network and whether this will be done by a USO, Government intervention or increased costs to remote users.

Commenting on Minister Lindsay Tanner's comment that the new model would be analogous with Australia Post, Mr Neville strongly urged the Minister to work more towards an ARTC model, ensuring that wholesale access would be available on equitable and competitive terms.

"This way all retail telco companies can compete in a vibrant market, forcing prices down for the average consumer."

“The principle of country Australia having to take second best is not acceptable. It’s crucial that all users of the network, regardless of whether it is fibre optic, wireless or satellite, get equitable access, speeds and charging.”

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