

Australian Local Government Association

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State of the Regions Report 2008 – 2009:

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Broadband boost a long overdue must for Australia

The latest economic snapshot of Australia's regions commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) predicts that the Rudd Government's moves on a national broadband network will "lay bare the years of misconceived federal telecommunications policy."

Details of the dire state of Australian telecommunications are contained in the 2008 - 09 State of the Regions report prepared by leading economic consultants, National Economics.

While the Rudd Government has begun the process of assessing tenders for the National Broadband Network, National Economics has reiterated previous reports to ALGA that Australia's knowledge economy continues to be shackled by the lack of an equitable high speed broadband network.

ALGA President, Cr Geoff Lake, speaking at the launch of the report said "We must move to drag Australia into the world of modern communications. Last year's State of the Regions report identified \$3.2 billion and 33,000 jobs lost to Australian businesses in 12 months due to inadequate broadband infrastructure. The current report indicates no improvement in these numbers for 2009."

National Economics stresses that wireless broadband services in Australia are still relatively expensive and the cost of these services could continue to constrain the development of businesses located in regional Australia as well as businesses delivering services via broadband.

National Economics describes as "extremely frustrating" the years of sluggish response to the manifest demand for improved telecommunications.

"The Howard Government failed to move Australia into the 21st century with a competitive broadband network. Local government welcomes the high priority the Rudd Government has afforded the national broadband network, however, there is much ground to be made up. We must move now and move faster," commented Cr Lake.

The report demonstrates that while policy issues have stalled the roll-out of the national network, business competitors overseas have created broadband services that are not only faster but also cheaper.

"One of the most disappointing issues identified in the latest State of the Regions report is that Indigenous communities are particularly disadvantaged because of the inadequate provision of internet services," Cr Lake said. "The benefits flowing from high speed broadband for

communities in Australia's remote regions could be significant in helping reshape the local economies, build skills and improve health and educational outcomes.

"The inequitable provision of broadband and other telecommunications services to rural and regional Australia does nothing to assist these regions to improve their resilience to harsher economic times or their capacity to meet the additional costs of climate change" Cr Lake concluded.

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