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Extending the Social and Economic Benefits of Australia's Broadband Networks: Action in the time of COVID-19 (Summary)



Submitted by Peter Gerrand on Sun, 31/05/2020 - 15:45

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Extending the Social and Economic Benefits of Australia's Broadband Networks: Action in the time of COVID-19

[**Summary of a Discussion Paper** prepared by the NBN Futures Group^[3]. The full discussion paper will be posted separately on the TelSoc Broadband webpage.]

Principal Author: John Burke

Achieving the full social and economic benefits of broadband networks and delivering measurable value to end users will be a major component of the next phase of broadband development in Australia, following the completion of the initial build of the NBN.

Australia needs a substantial and focused approach to pursuing this objective.

Developing this approach will require a contemporary policy focus to embrace a demand-side, user- focused perspective.

The present COVID-19 crisis demonstrates the potential benefits of broadband networks in areas including:

- online learning
- telehealth
- community contact
- entertainment
- online business
- working from home

and other creative developments.

The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted the negative impact of digital exclusion on the ability of citizens to participate in such online activities.

The discussion paper, after canvassing the current circumstances, proposes:

- the immediate establishment of a Broadband Capability Task Force (working title) to focus on the extension of applications and the problem of digital inclusion at the present time, and
- the longer-term development of a Broadband Institute (working title) with the intention to drive understanding and development of social and economic benefits of broadband networks.

Possible specific objectives and activities are presented.

Noting that the recent COVID-19 Relief Fund established by NBN Co is a significant contribution to the digital inclusion issue, the potential role of NBN Co in these developments is particularly relevant.

As a basis for discussion and further development, a number of relevant considerations are identified and briefly sketched; and a range of active stakeholders is identified.

Comments on the paper are sought, with questions posed:

- Are there additional issues to be considered so as to properly address the social and economic benefits of broadband networks? What other approaches to pursuing these benefits should be considered?
- Is the proposal for a Broadband Capability Task Force, as an agency active in the post COVID-19 situation, one to be pursued for its immediate benefits and its possible lead into the longer-term development of a Broadband Institute? Are there other actions which should be taken into account in considering this development?
- Is there merit in the proposal for an ongoing Broadband Institute? If so, what further issues need to be considered in its development? Might an existing entity undertake its functions?

NOTE: The full paper can be downloaded here in pdf form: [Download Link](#) ^[4]

The NBN Futures Group

Members (in alphabetical order)

Professor Trevor Barr, John Burke (convenor), Dr Leith Campbell, John Costa, Dr Richard Ferrers, Professor Peter Gerrand, Andrew Hamilton, Peter Hitchiner, Tim Herring, Dr Jim Holmes, Allan Horsley, Dr Murray Milner and Dr Craig Watkins

NBN Futures Forums conducted

Encouraging Debate on NBN Ownership Models ^[5], 31 July 2019

Realising the User Potential of the NBN ^[6], 22 October 2019

Learning from International Experience ^[7], 25 February 2020

Journal articles

Covering content presented in the first forum

Leith Campbell and Murray Milner, "The NBN Futures Forum" ^[8]

Peter Gerrand, "NBN Futures: The Option of Merging NBN Co with InfraCo, as a Benefit to the Digital Economy" ^[9]

Jim Holmes, "Getting the NBN Infrastructure We Need" ^[10]

Project overview:

Jim Holmes and Leith Campbell, "The NBN Futures Project" ^[11]

Covering content presented in the second forum:

Leith Campbell, "The NBN Futures Forum: Realising the User Potential of the NBN" ^[12]

Teresa Corbin, "Promoting Digital Inclusion Through the NBN" ^[13]

Covering content presented in this third forum – three papers still to be published

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Broadband_Network/smallbusinessandcase/Submissions ^[14] (Submission 20)

PDF version of this article

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