



# TelSoc

## Telecommunications & the Digital Economy

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## TelSoc Provides Expert Testimony to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the NBN

### TelSoc News and Events

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14th August 2020

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TelSoc was today summoned before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the NBN to provide further input following the submission we made on 16th January to the JPC.

Prof Reg Coutts is still recuperating after an operation, so the task was delegated to Tim Herring (myself) and Jim Holmes (member of the TelSoc Policy Committee and former Board Member) to represent TelSoc and the NBN Futures Group (a group of TelSoc members who wish to see best practice public policy settings and infrastructure for the provision of broadband services in Australia, and for the NBN in particular). This group prepared the original submission submitted to the JPC in January under TelSoc's name.

We read a short submission, followed by 110 minutes of questioning from Labor, Independent and Coalition in turn. The good news is that most of the questions (too numerous to list) were on our vision for the future of the NBN and areas where we thought there should be improvement. We politely parried questions dwelling on the past and made it clear we were here to advocate a (Long Term) National Broadband Strategy for Australia, of which the NBN is part, and to identify and plan for improvements. This plan is to be bi-partisan and transparent, as befits a public, government business enterprise (GBE) accountable to the Australian people as a vital national infrastructure and utility. Please see the key points from our submission below.

We invited the members of the JPC to attend the Online Seminar next Tuesday (18th), this time focusing on Telehealth and Digital Inclusion.

We also encourage all TelSoc Members to enrol (spaces limited) - [see the TelSoc website](#) [3].

Remember to please pay your membership to TelSoc [4], which will enable us to continue with this vital work.

Tim Herring, TelSoc

### TelSoc Submission to the JPC on the NBN (extract)

1. We have drawn the following conclusions from our workshops, forums and other work to date:

1. NBN represents vital national infrastructure that reflects a long-term public investment. It now needs to be supported and guided by a similarly long term public National Broadband Strategy with bipartisan support,
2. NBN needs to be upgraded to the point at which it provides competitive advantage to Australian SMEs, especially those in rural and regional areas, and can deliver essential services, especially telehealth, distance learning and working from home, across Australia.
3. Improvement of services to both suburban and rural Australia is critical to the nation's equitable participation in our digital society and digital economy.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the social and economic benefits of broadband networks – through the heightened engagement in activities such as telehealth, online learning, personal communications via videoconference, working from home, business presence, creative and cultural activities, etc. It has, however, also demonstrated significant issues of digital exclusion.
5. It is the Group's view that a National Broadband Strategy should include a strong, long-term focus on a demand-side, user focus, to the two themes of better understanding and scaling up valuable online activities and the development of comprehensive digital inclusion programs to ensure citizens have the capability to engage with these and other online activities.
6. The NBN's upgrading needs to be funded to take place in a relatively short time frame, e.g. five years maximum, for reasons of both equity and economic benefit.
7. The NBN needs to be positioned so as to provide infrastructure support to 5G networks (which are basically fibre-plus-microwave transit networks with 5G Radio Access Networks) as well as to compete with them at the network edges.
8. The NBN Co represents vital national wholesale infrastructure, it should remain in public ownership at least in the foreseeable future to enable it to grow into a sustainable business.
9. Furthermore, NBN Co's charter should be further developed to be consistent with the requirements of the next decade, to incorporate the use of emerging technologies and reflect the demand side requirements of business, government and residential users looking ahead.
10. For example, NBN's charter should provide for infrastructure support for the Internet of Things (IoT) at the wholesale level, and to provide for demand-side growth.
11. In the shorter term we encourage greater emphasis by NBN Co on improving its revenue position through digital literacy and other programs to maximise the connection of the 4 million premises that are passed by its broadband infrastructure but not yet connected.

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With the compliment of TelSoc

Telecommunications Association Inc.

ABN 34 732 327 053

<https://telsoc.org> <sup>[5]</sup>

Contact TelSoc <sup>[6]</sup>

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[2] <https://telsoc.org/printpdf/2912?rate=njn1w1qZXO8iqFFeSTHF6NYHhj8YfKsMnG7asFdVcMQ> [3] <https://telsoc.org/event/nbn-futures-forum-social-and-economic-benefits-broadband-networks-telehealth-and-digital> [4] <https://telsoc.org/renew> [5] <https://telsoc.org> [6] <https://telsoc.org/contact/newsletters>