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CHANGE REGIONAL BROADBAND LEVY: NBN PANEL



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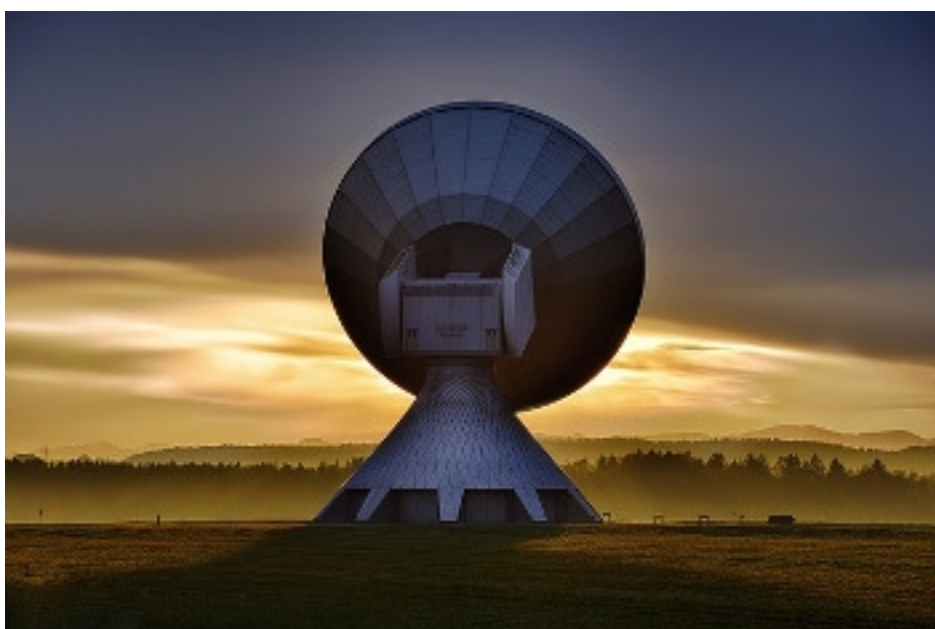
HOUSE PANEL ASKS GOVT TO CHANGE REGIONAL BROADBAND LEVY

The Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee into the NBN has recommended that the Government update the modelling of its proposed regional broadband levy, in order to reflect the cost increases since the original modelling in 2015.

It said any change should recognise that the levy "does not constitute a sustainable funding mechanism, and is better re-purposed as a level playing field competition measure".

The recommendation was one of 20 contained in the panel's second report; this time the focus was on regional and rural Australia.

The Government [proposed](#) the industry levy in December 2016, and it was supposed to fund the costs of paying for provision of the NBN in unprofitable regional areas.



The so-called Regional Broadband Scheme was estimated to raise about \$40 million by imposing a levy on "superfast" (or "NBN-comparable") fixed-line broadband services which can offer speeds of 25 megabits per second or more.

The committee recommended that the NBN Co should stop replicating

wholesale fixed-line product tiers on fixed-wireless due to the increasing congestion on the fixed-wireless network.

It sought data from the government to show the number of premises formerly on ADSL that fell into the footprint of the NBN Co's Sky Muster satellite footprint.

The panel also called on the NBN Co to use expanded "layer 3" capabilities to increase the monthly data allowances for satellite users.

It asked the NBN Co to work with retail service providers to promote take-up of Sky Muster services in areas where there was no alternative connection option.

Sam Varghese

ALP SAYS FIXED-WIRELESS CONGESTION CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The Australian Labor Party has expressed concern over the state of the fixed-wireless service offered by the NBN Co and identified in the second report of the Joint Standing Committee on the NBN as likely to be due to congestion.

Shadow Minister for Regional Communications, Stephen Jones and the deputy chair of the panel, Josh Wilson, issued a joint statement.

They said the congestion had come about due to the decision by NBN Co to reduce its fixed-line footprint and over-subscribe the fixed-wireless network.

Jones and Wilson said, with a view to maintaining the universal service obligations in future, the panel had recommended that the capacity of the Sky Muster satellites were better utilised, using the layer three capabilities to provide more data.

Two other recommendations cited were:

- "a rethink of how NBN fixed-wireless products are structured to improve experience, recognising consumers may be better served by a structure that reflects the characteristics of wireless technology and moves away from replicating fixed line product structures; and
- "renewed focus on infrastructure sharing in regional Australia to support improved quality of NBN services."

The report, issued on Monday and focusing on rural and regional Australia, also [recommended](#) a change to the proposed broadband levy.

Jones and Wilson also mentioned the recommendation about the broadband levy, claiming this was "a clear policy rebuke" to Communications Minister Mitch Fifield.

They said the panel had also recognised the raw deal that regional Australia had received with respect to the rollout of fibre-to-the-kerb - what NBN Co calls fibre-to-the-curb.

According to the two committee members, too few regional areas were being served this technology.

The FttK option means a much shorter copper lead-in, with fibre being laid up to the nature strip in the front of a property.

The Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition said it welcomed the recommendations of the panel.

“The Coalition has long been calling for Sky Muster satellite services that are fit for purpose,” said ACCAN director of Policy, Una Lawrence.

“These recommendations, along with the new NBN product announcements are a considerable step in the right direction and we look forward to their arrival early next year.”



NSW Farmers President James Jackson acknowledged the recommendations aimed at alleviating congestion on fixed wireless towers were a step in the right direction but stressed that it was up to NBN Co to take action.

“Regional customers have been impacted by fixed wireless congestion due to a higher than anticipated migration to this product,” he said.

"While this is positive, it now requires NBN Co to take requisite measures to balance this inequality on fixed wireless and ensure an effective and reliable broadband service. “

Sam Varghese



John de Ridder

Telecommunications Economist

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LABOR ACCUSES GOVT OF AVOIDING NBN 'INCONVENIENT METRICS'

The Australian Labor Party has, predictably, slammed the Federal Government for avoiding any mention of what it calls "inconvenient metrics" in the NBN Co's first-quarter results which were announced on Monday.

Labor Shadow Communications Minister Michelle Rowland and Shadow Finance Minister Jim Chalmers said both Communications Minister Mitch Fifield and Finance Minister Matthias Cormann had given an "out-of-touch assessment of their second-rate NBN".

The [results](#) showed that NBN Co had not increased its average revenue per user from the level of \$44 for the full-year 2018 and was still continuing to haemorrhage money.

The statement referred disparagingly to support Cormann and Fifield had offered to the home affairs minister Peter Dutton when he challenged Malcolm Turnbull for the leadership of the Liberal Party a few months ago.

The two ministers had said, "Shareholders welcomed the results which confirm the company's solid performance across all metrics."

"Of course, we wouldn't expect either of these two dynamic number crunchers to be drawing any attention to the inconvenient 'metrics' below," Rowland and Chalmers said.

They cited the following as proof of their accusations:

- "A second-rate network that is [\\$21.4 billion](#) over budget;
- "A rollout that is four years behind [the promised timeline](#);
- "A \$900 million hit to taxpayers as a result of the bungled HFC rollout;
- "The inability of NBN Co [to secure private debt](#) which required taxpayers to step in with a \$19.5 billion loan;
- "A recent three-year deferral of when NBN Co was due to repay its government loan from 2021 to 2024 that is yet to be reflected in the budget papers;
- "A 1075% blowout in the copper remediation bill to \$640 million;
- "Average revenue per user that has only increased by \$1 in the last two years;
- "A total of 300,000 premises [vanishing off the NBN rollout plan](#) – despite the build cost of the rollout increasing by a further \$2.1 billion; and
- "Small businesses reporting they are losing an average of \$9000 [when switching to NBN](#)."

Rowland and Chalmers claimed the NBN was in such a mess that even after five years in the job, Cormann was unable to get anyone willing to loan NBN Co money on acceptable terms.

"All the while, New Zealand, the US and the UK have reduced the cost of deploying fibre-to-the-premises by between 40% and 50%," they claimed.

Sam Varghese

SKYPE VOICE AND VIDEO WITH ALEXA ARRIVING IN AUSTRALIA

Amazon's talented Alexa assistant has gained yet another new skill, letting users make Skype calls by voice, and with the Echo Show and Echo Spot, making video calls, too.

Skype calling with Alexa has started to roll out to customers in Australia, New Zealand, US, UK, India and Canada, according to Amazon and its Alexa media people.



We're told that this new integration provides "a convenient, hands-free way to connect with friends and family around the world by simply using voice -- just in time for the holidays!"

So, how does it work?

Well, by linking a Skype account, Amazon says "customers can use Alexa to connect with the hundreds of millions of people already using Skype globally."

"Virtually celebrate the upcoming holidays with long distance relatives, catch up with international friends, and reconnect with loved ones far away by simply saying, "Alexa, call William on Skype" to reach him wherever he uses Skype".

To get started is easy:

1. In the Alexa App or on alexa.amazon.com, go to Menu > Settings > Communication
2. Select the link to add a Skype account and a sign-in page will appear in the app
3. Sign in with your Skype account information to complete linking your Skype account

There is a note, however - if you want the "the best Skype calling and video experience, update to version 8.34 or later".

Amazon also advises that "Customers can both make and receive hands-free Skype calls on their Echo devices and in Show Mode on Fire Tablets".

Meanwhile, "Skype video calling is supported on the Echo Show and Echo Spot".'

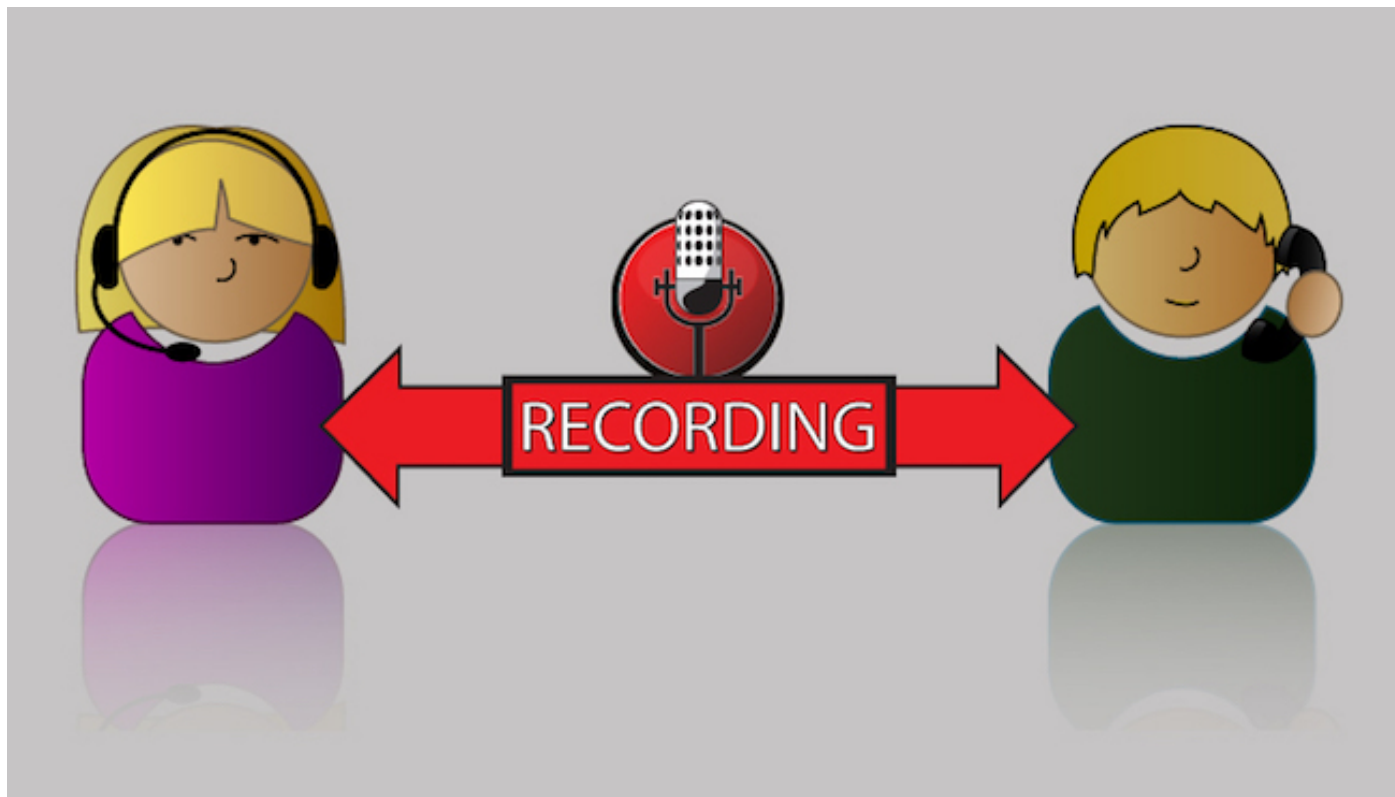
The [official Skype blog post has more detail here](#), and here on the [Alexa page on the Skype website](#), where you'll also find a couple of videos that I can't embed here, but are a click away.

Alex Zaharov-Reutt

DUBBER SEALS CALL RECORDING DEAL WITH VODAFONE NZ

Australian-listed call recording platform provider Dubber has secured a deal to provide its call recording and analytics suite to Vodafone New Zealand for fixed and mobile services.

Under the deal [Dubber](#) will provide its call recording platform for both fixed and mobile solutions as part of Vodafone's Fixed Mobile Convergence (FMC) strategy.



The recording service also forms part of Vodafone's 'Ready Government' programme.

Steve McGovern, CEO Dubber said, "Vodafone's strategy has been at the forefront of innovation in the Unified Communications sector.

"The Fixed Mobile Convergence model provides a substantial opportunity for Dubber via expanded user cases, particularly for mobile users, a sector where Vodafone has substantial market share."

Glenn Johnstone, CEO Vodafone Next Generation Services, said the telco had adopted Dubber's platform because it "uniquely meets the requirements of the telecommunications sector".

"The Vodafone recording service brings new functionality for our customers, such as the ability to record a mobile call on demand, a capability which has widespread opportunities across many of our market sectors."

Peter Dinham

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