# AUSTRALIAN COMPUTER SOCIETY

25 October 2007

Standing Committee on Broadband in
Rural and Regional Communities
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

## SUBMISSION BY THE AUSTRALIAN COMPUTER SOCIETY

The following represents the views of the Australian Computer Society for consideration by the Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities.

The ACS believes that deployment of broadband is one of the key issues facing communications in Australia at the moment. The development of broad band infrastructure to provide true broadband access to all Australians is essential to the social and economic future of Australia and is particularly crucial for rural Australia to reduce isolation, the constraints imposed by distance and improve health, education, employment and quality of life options for rural communities.

Broadband services will make a range of networked communications applications possible that will change business and user behaviour and the way on line content is delivered and managed. It will allow many businesses and employees to locate outside of the main metropolitan business districts to take advantage of cheaper accommodation and services. It will improve work-life options for Australian employees and allow industry diversification in rural and regional economies.

Broadband provides the potential to revitalise many of Australia's rural communities provided they have the necessary infrastructure to support this potential.

Accordingly the ACS strongly supports NSW Government endeavours to provide access to broadband services for rural communities. Clearly, the cost of deploying services within rural and remote towns is significantly higher than in urban centres because they lack the economies of scale that can be achieved in more densely populated areas. This makes it difficult to provide broadband services at prices close to or comparable to those enjoyed by subscribers in cities. It's therefore essential that cost and other barriers that inhibit entry of online service providers be identified and reduced for regional and rural based enterprises and subscribers to ensure there is equity in service levels and pricing comparable to that enjoyed by urban centres.

As part of this inquiry, it will be important to recognise and address the digital divide that is beginning to become very apparent within Australia between those who do and those who don't have ready access to online services and the skills to use them, within both rural and urban communities. The digital divide exacerbates all other problems seen in disadvantaged communities such as lack of employment opportunities, access to community/government services, education and health because of the increasing reliance on online services to deliver these benefits.

Additionally, a key issue for rural communities is not only availability of online services but also the support to keep these services in operation. These are areas where government can have a profound effect in improving the outcomes in health, education and employment for many rural communities.

ICT Professionals Shaping Our Future

Key issues for the Standing Committee to consider in its investigation into broadband include:

## Technologies

* Investigate a mix of wired and unwired technologies so the best solutions can be applied to solve the needs of different communities;

* Solutions put into place should be up-gradable to cater for new and emerging technologies;

* Use open standards to avoid vendor lock in;

* Technologies implemented should come with a quality of service guarantee that should be clearly defined;

* Technology specifications should not be drafted solely with currently available products in mind. To do so will preclude innovative and new technologies from being considered and will result in outdated technologies being installed;

* Appropriate compliance and auditing governance should be implemented that does not rely on consumers to report all problems. A required level of performance should be defined with penalties/bonus options according to achieved performance.

## Delivery Model

* Equal quality of service may not be possible for all locations because of physical or economic reasons. These need to be investigated and documented;

* The service provision model should be sustainable and profitable for the service provider over the economic life of the investment;

* Competition should be a key aspect of the delivery model to avoid monopolistic pricing and standards;

* Service levels should be specified and realistic and represent true broadband;

* The delivery model should report on quantifiable measures such as costs, take up, down load and up load speeds, availability of service etc.

## Suppliers and Consumers

* Tenders should encourage local industry and SME participation and specifications should be worded so as not to preclude new innovative technologies or such that they essentially specify current and outdated technologies;

* Access to services by disadvantaged communities should be considered when developing the supply/use model in accordance with the problems that are being exacerbated by the digital divide – skills, access and service support. Also there should be consideration on how we can provide and leverage online services to benefit all communities and businesses – eg free hot spots in tourist areas; services in community centres, regional libraries, schools and hospitals.

* Trustworthiness, reliability and security are paramount when introducing true broadband services. Consumers are often the weakest chain in the security link and education about online security measures is imperative if we are to ensure consumer confidence in using online services to conduct their business and avoid increases in

scamming and phishing schemes in line with the increased uptake of broadband services (which will destroy consumer confidence).

- Education of small businesses and the community on the benefits and use of online services that will result from high speed broadband is also essential to ensure we make the most of the broadband infrastructure investment.

The ACS believes the development of communications of communications infrastructure such as broadband should be treated in the same way in which water, electricity, road and other infrastructure projects are delivered to rural and remote communities, requiring significant government involvement to help establish services in areas that may not, in the first instance, be commercially viable.

Clearly, Federal Government policies are going to impact the Australia's broadband landscape over the next 3 years, regardless of which Party is elected to the Federal Government. Accordingly, it is imperative that the Standing Committee have close regard to Federal Government initiatives in carrying out its investigation.

The ACS has strong expertise in the area of communications and would be happy to assist the Standing Committee in whatever way it can. If you have any queries or would like further information on any of the points raised, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Len Joynson, ACS Policy Manager on 02 8289 4418 or Mr Glen Willis, Economic Development, NSW ACS, 02 8824 9949.

Yours sincerely

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