



**Minister for Education and Training
Minister for Industrial Relations
Minister for the Central Coast
Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance**

TAXED

Mr P Costa MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and
Regional Communities
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

RML 07/5193
A58436

Attention: Mrs Cheryl Samuels

Dear Mr Costa

I write in response to your letter of 8 November 2007, regarding submissions to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities.

I am pleased to provide a submission to the Committee on behalf of the NSW Department of Education and Training.

The NSW Government has long recognised the importance of high speed broadband access across the state. The NSW Government's Telecommunications Strategy - "Broadband for an information society", September 2002, identified Education and Health as the high priority areas requiring broadband services. The strategy is available for download from the Government Chief Information Office website - <http://www.oit.nsw.gov.au/docs/Telcos.pdf>

As with all high cost infrastructure, the primary disincentive to the expanded rollout of broadband by telecommunications carriers is the potential lack of a return on their investment. The NSW Government recognised this in the 2002/03 State Budget with the allocation of an additional \$247 million over four years to enable the Department of Education and Training to connect most schools, TAFE colleges and other departmental sites to broadband service of 2 megabits per second or better. By the end of 2005, more than 96 per cent of the Department's services had bandwidths of 2 megabits per second with another 3 per cent having bandwidths of between 512 kilobits per second and 2 megabits per second.

Without this direct government subsidy, commercial reality would mean that many schools and TAFE colleges would not have been connected to broadband services. For example, in July 2006, the Department of Education and Training entered into a three year contract to connect Goodooga and Coolah Central Schools in Western NSW to symmetric and scalable 2 megabits per second services. This particular contract contained an installation component of \$143,000 required to lay several kilometres of fibre optic cable between the telecommunications exchange and Goodooga Central School.

Importantly, the new contract achieved significantly improved services to both schools, matching many metropolitan schools, while delivering savings of \$96,765 over the term of the contract when compared to the schools' existing services. Had the funding of these connections been left

to market forces alone, it is likely that they would not have become commercially viable for many years.

It is important to note that the commercial rationale used by telecommunication companies to determine investment in broadband infrastructure also affects metropolitan as well as rural and regional areas. Along with a considerable number of rural and regional schools, many metropolitan schools do not have access to scalable broadband services.

In addition to the roll out of broadband to NSW schools and TAFE colleges, this Government established the Government Broadband Service (GBS) which is a high-speed data communications network aimed at improving the delivery of key services including education, health, police, justice and every-day government services to the residents of regional and rural NSW.

While the Government Broadband Service supports broadband services “within catchment” in and around 24 major rural and regional centres, more than half of the Department’s sites are outside of the Government Broadband Service area. The Department’s schools and TAFE colleges are generally spread further across the state and are more isolated than any other agency’s sites. Our remote schools are often located beyond the last hospital, Department of Community Services’ office, or police station.

Enhancing the bandwidth available to schools and TAFE colleges remains one of the NSW Government’s top priorities and this is demonstrated through the commitment to online learning through the Connected Classrooms program. The program includes \$63 million over the next four years to further enhance the bandwidth and security of the Department of Education and Training’s wide area network.

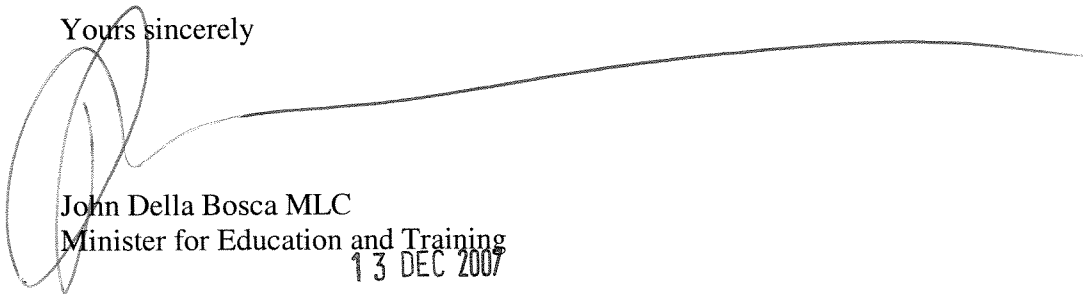
Senior officers from the Department of Education and Training have assisted with the preparation of a submission from the Australian Information and Communications Technology in Education Committee (AICTEC) to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, dated October 2007. The Standing Committee might consider obtaining a copy of this submission as it details many examples of the benefits and opportunities that access to broadband brings to the educational sector including ready access to quality electronic resources and knowledge sharing networks that support up-skilling, retraining, distance and class-based learning. The contact person for this Committee is Ms Sue Hollands, Executive Officer – AICTEC, telephone number (02) 6201 2983 and the AICTEC website is <http://www.aitect.edu.au/aitect>.

Access to online services is arguably more important for students and teachers located in rural and regional centres than for their counterparts located in metropolitan centres.

Notwithstanding the leadership exercised by the NSW Government, more can and needs to be done. Ironically, the availability of telecommunications services, especially broadband, is generally poorest where it is needed the most.

I look forward to your Committee’s report.

Yours sincerely



John Della Bosca MLC
Minister for Education and Training

13 DEC 2007