




AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL BROADBAND STRATEGY





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VISION

Australia will be a world leader in the availability and effective use of broadband, to deliver enhanced outcomes in health, education, community, commerce, and government and to capture the economic and social benefits of broadband connectivity

Australia's National Broadband Strategy has been developed collaboratively between the Australian Government, state and territory governments and local government.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the National Broadband Strategy is to coordinate activities across government and to provide a holistic approach to broadband development in Australia with a view to achieving long-term strategic outcomes. The Australian Government and state and territory governments have agreed to adopt this document as the National Broadband Strategy for Australia. It has been developed with reference to the Australian Government's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy and state and territory strategies for broadband development. The National Broadband Strategy Implementation Group (NBSIG), consisting of the Australian Government and all state and territory governments will drive the National Broadband Strategy through a coordinated and cooperative approach.

The market is the primary determinant in the delivery of broadband services. However, government has an important role to play both in enabling market driven broadband outcomes and in facilitating broadband access in areas where the market may not provide services at fair and reasonable prices within an acceptable timeframe. There are impediments to Australia realising the full benefits of broadband connectivity – such as price barriers and a lack of affordable broadband services – particularly in regional, rural and remote areas. In any action taken, governments will promote commercially sustainable investment and market operation.

Governments also have an important role to play in encouraging the development of content and applications, particularly for the delivery of government services. Access to government services and information will be a key driver of broadband development. Governments will also be involved in encouraging the development of Australia's digital content industries.

BENEFITS OF BROADBAND

Increasingly broadband connectivity is recognised by governments around the world as enabling major improvements in economic and social wellbeing. Widespread, high-speed communications access can deliver significant increases in GDP, expand employment, increase international competitiveness and improve quality of life.

Accelerating the adoption and effective use of broadband across Australia will improve our international competitiveness. The widespread diffusion of broadband technologies has the potential to revolutionise the way services are delivered in a range of sectors including health, education and research. This will allow Australians to more quickly realise the benefits of new employment opportunities, improved education and health care, more effective delivery of government and business services and greater flexibility to exchange information and communicate with each other.

Broadband connectivity can also enhance community cohesion through novel and enhanced communications as well as deliver better choice and convenience for families and individuals in work and other aspects of daily life.

Regional, rural and remote Australia makes a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of Australia. Enhanced services through broadband connectivity will enable people to more fully engage in business, cultural and community activities and thus increase the prospect of regional growth and sustainability.

AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Australia covers a large geographical area which presents challenges for the rollout of infrastructure. In addition, very low population densities in most of regional, rural and remote Australia make it difficult from a commercial perspective to provide access at affordable prices equitable with those in more populous markets.

Compared to other industrialised nations, Australia has a relatively small population base and domestic market. As a result Australian industry must develop an export focus and cater for overseas markets. Broadband has an important place in providing access to global markets.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The market is the primary determinant in the delivery of broadband services. Government also has an important role in promoting market driven broadband outcomes and in taking action in areas where the market will not provide services at fair and reasonable prices within an acceptable timeframe. Government, in implementing the Strategy, will work closely with the commercial and private sector to enhance outcomes for users.

The Australian Government has the primary role in developing policy and managing the regulatory environment for telecommunications services.

A pro-competitive regulatory environment will foster the deployment and take-up of broadband. The Australian Government has provided and will continue to provide a responsive regulatory regime that advances the long-term interests of end users, promotes facilities and services based competition and maximises flexibility in the development and application of broadband supporting technologies. To this end the Australian Government will monitor the ongoing effectiveness of its policy and regulatory framework with a view to maximising its appropriateness for Australia's circumstances.

A significant role for all levels of government is the procurement of broadband services to deliver enhanced outcomes in health, education and other government services, and, where appropriate, in leveraging broader benefits to business and the community.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments will work together to enhance broadband services as identified in this Strategy.

Governments will cooperate across portfolios and jurisdictions to improve broadband procurement practices and outcomes.

WHAT IS BROADBAND?

Broadband allows users fast, 'always-on' online access to digital content, applications and a range of services, some or all of which can occur simultaneously.

Broadband access is of critical importance to take full advantage of new communication tools and next generation applications.

Focusing on what people can do with broadband rather than defining a particular speed recognises that any definition should be able to encompass changes in technology and applications. Broadband is evolutionary - what is perceived as fast in today's context may be overtaken by technological developments. Different users in the economy have different needs from broadband. Some users will have a need for very high capacity and high speed, while for others low latency or guaranteed redundancy may be more important.

Achieving full benefits from broadband requires matching specific needs with available solutions.

OBJECTIVES

To facilitate **fair and reasonable access** to broadband and its benefits by all Australians.

To **enhance choices and opportunities** for all Australians in work and other aspects of daily life independent of location, background, age or interests.

To maximise the **quality and range of services** available to all communities through innovative use of broadband for education, learning, health and delivery of government services.

To strengthen the **social cohesion of communities** through better access to online services leading to enhanced communication between people, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities.

To increase **productivity** by providing a platform for Australian innovation and transforming the economy, enhancing GDP, and improving the international competitiveness of Australian industry – leading to employment and wage growth.

To facilitate the **innovative use of broadband by business** to improve processes, employ new business strategies, access new opportunities and deliver enhanced services to end-users.

To **support the research community** to participate effectively in collaborative national and global research and learning networks.

To **foster creativity** in the way Australians work, live and play, and to provide new opportunities for the celebration and evolution of Australia's diverse ideas, history and culture.

To strengthen **infrastructure for the information economy** by developing a range of tools and practices to promote market confidence in broadband applications. These include standards, interoperable systems and security.

PRINCIPLES

The following nine principles will guide the implementation of the Strategy.

Coordination and collaboration: industry stakeholders, the Australian Government and state, territory and local governments will work together to realise efficient and effective provision of broadband infrastructure, applications and services.

Equity: All Australians should have fair and reasonable access to broadband and its benefits. Policy will have regard to barriers including price, location and culture.

Market-based investment: Competitive markets in which service providers receive appropriate returns on their investments will drive the provision of broadband connectivity, applications and content. Where markets do not deliver services in a timely, affordable, efficient or equitable manner, government action is likely to be warranted in the public interest. In all cases, commercially sound and sustainable investment should underpin decision making and market operation.

Sustainable intervention: Broadband policies, regulation and other initiatives should be transparent and flexible and should build foundations for sustainable contestable markets, including innovative technology solutions. Policies will embrace technological and competitive neutrality.

Strategic decision-making: Government procurement, leverage and funding should be used to foster pro-competitive outcomes where possible. Decisions should be made with a view to optimising sustainable long-term objectives.

Leveraging advantage: Governments should use their position as leading purchasers of telecommunications services to underpin demand aggregation strategies and share associated improvements in price and service delivery with communities.

Policy responsiveness: Technology, user needs and markets are highly dynamic, therefore policy settings and programs should be responsive and adaptive.

Economic development: Australia should exploit the advantages of broadband to improve business operations and the delivery of government services, with a view to claiming a greater share of the benefits of the emerging global information economy.

Innovation: Australia should pursue continuous innovation and productivity improvements by enhancing global connectivity for research and development, and by promoting and applying world class, innovative broadband technologies, applications, content and services.

PRIORITY ISSUES

Government actions will focus on the following key priority issues:

NATIONAL COORDINATION

A coordinated approach through the National Broadband Strategy will ensure that broadband investment by the Australian Government and state and territory governments support national strategic priorities, including regional priorities and the specific needs of key sectors including health and education. This will contribute to:

- improved broadband infrastructure across the country
- the wide distribution of best practice in broadband development and procurement
- improved outcomes in terms of services and prices for regional broadband access
- a focusing of resources towards areas that will not be adequately served by the market within a reasonable time period.

The NBSIG will assist governments to develop and coordinate policies and programs within the National Broadband Strategy.

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

Government policy will support the development of competitive markets that deliver sustainable benefits in broadband connectivity and services.

Targeted funding from all levels of government for broadband initiatives will aim to deliver significant economic, security or social benefits, where such public benefit outcomes will not be achieved in a reasonable timeframe.

BUILDING USER UNDERSTANDING

Access to broadband-enabled benefits such as educational opportunities, improved health care and business processes, productivity gains and better government services will be enhanced through user groups having improved understanding of what broadband can deliver.

Under the National Broadband Strategy, governments will facilitate measures to assist individuals and groups to make informed decisions regarding the adoption of broadband.

SKILLS

Engagement by individuals, organisations and communities with the information economy can strengthen interaction between people, groups and regions. Likewise, businesses can benefit from an increased level of ICT awareness among consumers by developing new markets. However, individuals, organisations, and communities will only engage in the information economy when they have the necessary tools and knowledge, and possess the skills to apply these tools and knowledge in a meaningful way.

Initiatives to develop skills in broadband applications will enhance strategic information capabilities in key industry sectors, enhance ICT diffusion and ICT management capabilities, develop capabilities in cultural and creative digital content creation and promote community development by building the capability to improve integration into national and global networks.

AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL CONTENT

Broadband takeup and the availability of compelling content are inextricably linked. The development, availability and use of Australian digital content will lead to increased takeup of broadband services, the digitisation and creation of cultural content, development of sectoral applications, and new business opportunities for industry.

Resources will be directed to assist in the development of appropriate content and to improve the competitiveness of the Australian content development industry.

DEMAND AGGREGATION

In some areas, the level of demand for broadband is sufficient to allow competitive market outcomes, but a lack of coordination of demand creates significant commercial risk for suppliers or does not allow users to negotiate with providers on equal terms.

Aggregating demand can improve the responsiveness of broadband supply to the needs of regional or sectoral user groups. This can improve the case for investment in infrastructure and improving the pricing of broadband services.

Services such as health, education and government services will be key anchor tenants for demand aggregation strategies. Through the investment supported by these anchor tenants, improved connectivity may be achieved for the wider community.

Under the Strategy governments will consider measures to support regional and sectoral demand aggregation and will support demand aggregation through procurement of broadband for government use where practical.

PROTECTION OF CRITICAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Security threats have the potential to inflict massive damage on the operation of the economy. As Australia's economy and society become more reliant on the information economy for its functioning, the requirement for smooth and secure operation of broadband technology becomes essential.

Government will continue to identify critical infrastructure protection priorities and recommend strategies to ensure that risk is minimized and business continuity, for both public and private sectors, is maximized.

Government will support an improved culture of security within both public and private organisations, investment in security research and development, and improved capabilities for analysis of security threats and vulnerabilities.

PLANNING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Access to broadband infrastructure is increasingly being recognised as a factor in home purchases or business premise leases. However, broadband infrastructure is not currently being installed as ubiquitously as electricity or water.

Governments will consider measures to encourage broadband deployment in the planning of new residential and business developments.

PRIORITY SECTORS

Government attention will be focused on the following key priority sectors:

REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

Access to higher bandwidth services is vital for the economic and social development of regional, rural and remote Australia, particularly for the delivery of improved education, health and community services and business access.

Regional, rural and remote areas are likely to require specific assistance from government to address barriers such as price, location and culture, if fair and reasonable access for all Australians to broadband services is to be achieved.

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

SMEs are collectively the largest employer in Australia and therefore growth in that sector has direct benefits to the economy through an increase in employment and productivity. Broadband can provide SMEs with opportunities to improve business processes, develop new business models and provide services to new markets.

Governments will undertake measures to promote the increased take-up of broadband by SMEs to deliver improved economic growth and employment levels.

COMMUNITIES

A high level of community connectivity can serve to break down isolation, aid the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills, and promote the creation of mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances. Community networks also have positive implications for the development of social capital within communities.

Through greater access to broadband services, communities will realise new opportunities for local development and stimulate the formation of networks for social, business, educational and other purposes. Governments will play a role in assisting communities to benefit from broadband connectivity.

HEALTH

Timely and effective delivery of health services are integral to the Australian economy. Australia's ageing population and the increasing costs of delivering health services necessitates the development of new approaches to health service delivery. There are significant productivity benefits to be gained from more widespread use of e-health services, the flow-on benefits from which will allow for the improvement of health services and outcomes.

The coordinated procurement of broadband services, including infrastructure for the sector, will enhance development and delivery of health-care.

Governments will seek to maximise the contribution of broadband to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of health care services and improved outcomes, including through the promotion of e-health applications and initiatives, such as teleradiology, telepsychiatry, home monitoring, the development of electronic health records and continuing medical education.

EDUCATION

Education is vital to the development of a skilled workforce; building the competitive capability of Australian firms and earning export revenue. Schools, higher educational institutions and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector will deliver enhanced learning outcomes through improved access to broadband connectivity. The education sector will also play a critical role in preparing Australians for a broadband and ICT-enabled future.

Governments will consider measures to enable schools and educational institutions to have the necessary bandwidth to access services and applications to facilitate research, interactive learning and access to innovative and varied online curriculum content.

RESEARCH

Australia's research community must be able to interact with domestic and international colleagues in collaborative research exercises to operate at the forefront of science and technology and to participate in innovative scientific development. Broadband can make such collaborative arrangements possible.

Governments will give priority to ensuring that Australia can participate effectively in collaborative national and international research activities.

ADVANCED INDUSTRIES

Australia needs to maintain pace with other countries in the development of innovation and technology industries which apply information and communication technologies (ICT). The prosperity of advanced industries could have a profound long-term impact on our economy.


Governments will consider opportunities to assist in deploying broadband infrastructure in this sector to facilitate growth in industries where ICT intersects with other advanced technologies including biotechnology, nano and materials technologies, and in emerging applications areas.

GOVERNANCE

The implementation of the National Broadband Strategy will be overseen by the NBSIG. The NBSIG will identify priority areas, agree on measurable outcomes and evaluate progress in achieving those outcomes.

ACTION PLAN

A companion document to the National Broadband Strategy is the Action Plan. This outlines activities that will be undertaken to achieve the objectives outlined in the strategy. This companion document will also outline the measurement and evaluation strategy.



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