

**Report to Council  
2012 Local Government NBN Summit  
held in Sydney, 29 March 2012  
by Cr Rod Macdonald**

**Background**

This Summit was held in Sydney and was attended by a broad cross section of Local Government representatives from across Australia. The aim of the conference was to provide a 'snap shot' of the progress of the NBN rollout and to provide case studies of the activities and preparation undertaken by councils in relation to NBN. It was also the day that the 3 year NBN rollout plan was announced. As reported, Geelong was included in this stage and it is planned to begin in September 2013.

Broadband Today Alliance (BTA), of which the City of Greater Geelong is a member, was the organisation leading the conference. BTA was formed, initially, to represent the interests of a small group of southern Queensland Councils, but has now increased its membership to include 120 local governments (representing approximately 6.5 million people) and 35 affiliate organisations.

Further information relating to the activities of the broadband Today Alliance can be found at [www.broadbandtoday.com.au](http://www.broadbandtoday.com.au)



**Preparing regions for Fibre roll out**

The morning session commenced with a presentation from NBN Co's Trent Williams, General Manager of External Affairs.

Trent discussed key aspects of the progress of the NBN rollout and detailed some of the learnings from the first sites and how the various priorities were being developed for the progression of this national project.

Importantly, NBN Co regards the participation of local government as critical to the successful introduction of the service. This ranges from relevant permit issue, sharing of data on service location, information relating to any environmentally sensitive areas, identification of heritage conservation areas and access to zoning maps and planning controls. Advice regarding major development proposals is also important.

Note: In Geelong this last point is particularly relevant as we currently have many new greenfield subdivision sites either approved or identified in the planning process. These new developments contain approximately 50,000 blocks.

Matthew Schultz, Regional Digital Economy Co-ordinator at Ipswich Council, presented on the progress of the NBN rollout in their city. Ipswich was chosen as a stage 1 rollout site. Matthew is also co-chair of the Broadband Today Alliance.

The experience of Ipswich is important. As an early rollout site there is much to be learned from them. The provision of information to NBN Co is a significant responsibility and to expedite the fibre installation an internal structure which is aware of what is required and is

ready to assist is essential. Ipswich also produced an extensive Business Case for setting up what is necessary to be NBN ready as a city. The Geelong digital strategy would ideally contain this information.

Council also needs to sign up for approval of the physical infrastructure installation, including road-side cabinets, land activity and access notice

Other issues that council needs to work through include: traffic management plans, waste disposal - under boring waste, disposal of spoil material, storm water from Telstra manholes and parking permits for construction.

In transitioning to a digital economy there are a number of challenges to consider: an aging population, declining productivity, increasing urbanisation, globalisation and how to strengthen and diversify regional economies. A successful city will include these issues in their future planning. Early adoption, broadly across a region, will also confer benefits for early adopters. A rapid take up of services and the creation of new businesses can be an attractor for others to relocate to the region and gain a competitive advantage as a 'smart city'.

We can see already that a growing uptake in cloud computing and exponential increases in mobile and wireless computing is changing the demand for data distribution and storage. If you consider just the impact that cloud computing, for example, will have on the data capacity of existing networks, the need for a fibre-optic system is clearly apparent.

Community and business education around the impacts and benefits of the new high speed fibre technology are at the top of the list of ongoing challenges for local government.

Ipswich have identified a digital economy action project; gathering data from around the city to assess the readiness of business and the community to adopt the technology. Matt Schultz stated that he believed that they need an evidence base to enable them to assess that readiness and look at what work is needed.

## **NBN and the Digital Economy**

### **A Broad Perspective - what can we do with the technology?**

A late morning session of presentations gave a broad perspective of NBN and the digital economy. Anthony Godden (NBNSCo - Territory Manager, Qld New Developments), Michael Whereat (Manager Broadband and the Digital Economy, Sunshine Coast Council), Dave Abrahams (NBN Advocate - DBCDE), Brad Howarth (Author of "A faster future") each made presentations and answered questions from conference participants.

The theme of discussions were that access to the internet was becoming faster, cheaper and more portable, with massive exponential growth in data traffic. Brad Howarth emphasised that "It's not about the technology. It's what we can do with the technology".

### **Benefits for a Regional Australia**

Most importantly - it levels the playing field for regional Australia. The work force portability of skills across the world will enable us to compete in a global market place.

(Note: At the same time we must realise now that we are in a global market place).

Teleworking now forms only a few percent of work force. In the next few years this will expand rapidly. The federal government's digital strategy has a goal that by 2020, 12% of employees having a teleworking arrangement with their employers. This will change the way people decide where to live. A regional home (and lifestyle) connected to the world market will be a reality for many more people.

## **Regional Experiences**

### **Local leaders discuss progress**

In the afternoon session, the focus was on the NBN rollout and the development of broadband strategies for regional communities. Speakers included: Tony Brun (CEO, City of Greater Geraldton), Peter Forbes (Manager PR Marketing & Tourism, Moorabool Shire), Peter Francis (Economic Development Manager Bass Coast Shire). Further experiences of NBN roll-out and advice was presented by Brian Hales (Economic Development Advisor, City of Onkaparinga), David Lynch, (Manager Economic Development and Strategic Projects, Townsville City Council) and Sandra McCarthy (Mayor, Kiama Municipal Council).

### **Geraldton - exploiting technology opportunities**

It was clear that there was a variable level of knowledge and progress across each of these regions. Geraldton, in particular, were working very hard to gain advantages for their region. Large scale wind and solar power 'farms' are part of this strategy. They are also involved on the bid for the "International Square Kilometer Array program (SKA)<sup>(1)</sup>", the world telescope project. Australia is currently among several countries bidding to host the system. It is envisaged to be completed by 2020. Significant data back haul capacity has been put into Geraldton and this (and more I would think) would be required to handle the data from the telescope. Tony Brun stated that when the telescope was turned on, more data would be produced in the first 30 seconds than has been passed over the internet since its inception. The computing power to process this data is also yet to be built. (note: we wish Geraldton every success with this bid).

( **Note**: The efficient management of power grids and in particular the management of variable supplies such as wind and solar is critical in maximising the value of the power generated. Smart grid technology can now be driven through the utilisation of fibre-optic technology. Some experts say the savings in power management across the country, alone, will pay for the NBN, just as it has done so in other countries<sup>(2)</sup>).

For example, the fibre optic infrastructure rolled out to every home and business in Chattanooga (Tennessee, USA) was achieved with this benefit being the initial purpose for the project. Victor Harbour in South Australia is also setting up a smart grid to manage the supply of locally generated power.)

1. [www.atnf.csiro.au/projects/ska/](http://www.atnf.csiro.au/projects/ska/)

2. Nick Ross, <http://www.abc.net.au/technology/articles/2012/04/27/3490479.htm>

## **Bacchus Marsh experience**

With Bacchus Marsh in the early rollout area, the Moorabool Shire's experience was also worth noting. Peter Forbes highlighted several main points. Strong business connections were the key to educating people and communication was the key to change. His main recommendations are:

1. develop a Broadband/digital plan,
2. Engage your organisation early,
3. talk benefits, not technology,
4. focus on knowing your community's needs,
5. manage expectations of roll-out timing,
6. educate your community on NBN now - what you can use it for when you get it, and
7. encourage local advocates

The views of other speakers in this session supported the approach of Moorabool Shire.

## **Local libraries play a role in public awareness**

It also emerged that local libraries were widely utilised to reach the broader community during public education campaigns. Townsville have employed a full time trainer for 2 years to drive their program. Other approaches have included using young people to run training sessions at libraries for older residents. In Kiama, courses are conducted at a school with students teaching seniors how to operate iPads. Courses have also included on-line shopping and cloud computing.

At Kiama these public training sessions have a two month waiting list. The value of the connection between the older and younger generations is readily apparent. Along with this approach to learning there has been a great uptake in adding oral and video content to historical and heritage collections.

## **Recommendations**

The City of Greater Geelong has developed a broadband advocacy project and engaged with both the federal government and NBN Co. Having been included in the NBN rollout in 2013, now is the time to move to the next stage of advocacy and engage with both the business and broader community as part of the education process and to ensure that we take advantage of the benefits that will come through the early fibre roll-out. This is supported by the experience of communities who have received the technology and responded quickly. Others who have not done so have lost that advantage.

1. Establishment of a digital strategy and program for engagement with both public and the business communities,
2. Engage early with NBN Co to establish the information required from council to support the smooth roll-out of the fibre network,
3. Commit resources to facilitate the adopted strategies, and
4. Continue as an active member of the Broadband Today Alliance to keep council at the forefront of developments and progress of the NBN project.