

More detail needed on NBN

Six-monthly progress reports sought on rollout.

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The parliamentary committee overseeing the rollout of the National Broadband Network is demanding more detailed information from both the federal government and NBN Co on the actual cost and progress of the multi-billion dollar project.

The first report of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network called for six-monthly reports on the progress of the NBN rollout.

The committee wants these reports to use established key performance indicators and performance measures, with the first due at least three months before the committee is next due to report to parliament.

The committee recommended NBN Co publish a detailed account of the impact on timing and budget of the rollout caused by delays in finalising deals with Telstra and Optus.

It also wants NBN Co to publish timeframes for the rollout of NBN

services to regional and remote areas and a commitment to communicate these timings to those areas.

NBN Co should also investigate the impact of the NBN on satellite broadband services, and make contingency plans against any potential reduction of broadband capacity in regional and remote areas as a consequence of the NBN rollout.

The report also called on government agencies to ensure they are ready to deliver services through the NBN, prior to being connected to the new network.

In a dissenting report, the Coalition members of the committee claimed NBN Co lacked accountability and was able to hide too much information behind claims of confidentiality.

These MPs said the committee had been provided with insufficient resources to properly scrutinise NBN Co and the rollout, and that NBN Co had failed to comply with the government's

statement of expectations in several important areas.

In response, committee chair Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) told parliament those calling for greater scrutiny through monthly or quarterly reports from NBN Co were misinterpreting the role of the committee.

"The majority of committee members, however, recognised that the committee is not a board of directors, that its parliamentary oversight role is broader and that, as its reporting requirements are twice yearly, performance measures reported by NBN Co. should be likewise," Mr Oakeshott said.

He said the political debate around the NBN was obscuring the fact that in his belief the NBN once built will be a significant asset on the financial books of the taxpayer.

"An initial spend on any asset – anything from a house to business investment – can lead to a much larger return in the future if the asset is built efficiently and effectively and if private equity is engaged in the right way at the right time," he said.

"With that in mind, this report flags that the committee ... will seek to satisfy itself about the government's view of where the points of entry are for private investment alongside public investment and to make sure maximum return on the government's investment is secured on behalf of Australian taxpayers."

Mr Oakeshott said while the focus has been on the cost and the complex engineering task of building the NBN over nine years, there are a number of critical secondary issues which should also be prioritised by the government for the NBN to deliver maximum value.

"These include issues such as: Australian content and copyright law, individual privacy and national security, taxation administration, government use of the internet generally, and timely and relevant data collection opportunities that now present themselves." •

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