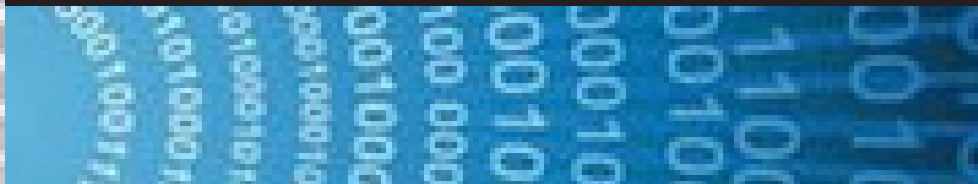




COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

As Chair of the Senate Standing Committee for the Environment, Communication and the Arts, I realise the growing importance of communications and the digital economy. Broadband internet and digital television are tools that should be made available for rural and regional Australia.

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- The National Broadband Network
 - Digital TV
 - Internet Filtering



The National Broadband Network

Some of the flaws in Rudd Labor's National Broadband Network (NBN):

- Senator Conroy has promised a fibre network to 90 per cent of Australians, but those in the 10 per cent who miss out will be those communities with the most to gain from fibre, such as families, farmers and businesses in rural and regional areas.
- Not one new internet connection has been delivered under the NBN policy in two years since the election of the Rudd Government.
- Taxpayers continue to pay the NBN Co CEO \$1.95m/year and a discredited ex-Labor MP \$500,000/year to be head of Government Relations and External Affairs - a company which generates no revenue, has no customers and delivers no services to anybody.
- In South Australia, Minister Michael O'Brien announced that the Rann Government is addressing 350 South Australian broadband black spots through a multi-million dollar private/public partnership project in conjunction with Adam Internet.



- The so-called 'Adam-Max' broadband black spot rollout by Adam Internet and the Rann Government is an expensive distraction from the shortcomings of Rudd Labor's NBN.
- Minister O'Brien and Premier Rann knew action on blackspots was long overdue, and know that the NBN won't deliver any action until 2017, if (in some cases) at all.
- Federal Minister for Broadband, Senator Stephen Conroy, still won't answer nuts and bolts questions about the rollout and viability of the \$43 billion NBN. And the Government's chief infrastructure adviser, Infrastructure Australia, wouldn't appear before our Senate Committee inquiring into the NBN – so just who is accountable for Rudd Labor's NBN policy?
- The Coalition's OPEL proposal would have delivered improved services to 1.5 million premises in rural and regional Australia, equipping homes with satellite or wireless broadband services by December 2009.
- The demand exists now; rural and regional Australians can't be left to languish till the NBN due date of 2018 – if it is ever delivered at all.



Rural and regional Australians deserve equivalent access to equivalent broadband services at equivalent prices.

Digital Television

The Rudd Government announced on 5 January 2010, that it will provide digital television to viewers after agreeing with broadcasters to upgrade coverage in blackspot areas.

The Labor Government promised it would provide digital access to 100 existing transmission sites and provide satellite access to those households not covered by the upgraded sites.

It sounds good until you realise that's only one sixth of the 600 existing towers. So why only 100? And how were those 100 particular transmission sites chosen?

Labor says it will spend \$40 million per year over the four year forward estimates to build and operate the satellite service.

But Labor has refused to commit to any details and it's uncertain whether local communities will be consulted about the upgrade.

Labor says that those rural and regional Australians currently serviced by the other sites which won't be upgraded, will be delivered free-to-air digital television services via satellite.

But all homes requiring a satellite service will need to purchase satellite receiver equipment, including a satellite dish.

Labor says 155,000 households, currently serviced by 'self-help' sites, requiring a satellite service will be entitled to a government subsidy of \$300 to help off-set the estimated cost of \$600.

But the 92,000 households who live outside these areas will receive no subsidy to help pay for the satellite receiver. And what if the installation is more difficult than expected? Who pays?

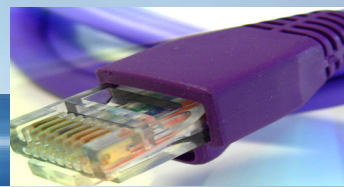
Labor says rural and regional Australians will receive digital television from an upgraded tower.

But many will have to pay more because the transmission towers delivering them analogue television today will not be included in the upgrade for the yet to be announced 100 or so sites.

The Coalition says that no TV viewer should be worse off in terms of ability to access TV services when the switchover occurs.

But with so many 'buts' and no details, Rudd Labor fails to assure Australians they won't be worse off.

The Digital switchover will take shape in a phased rollout across Australia between 2010 and 2013. The South-East, upper Spencer Gulf and Riverland will receive digital in the second-half of 2010. Adelaide will switch to digital in late 2013.



Internet Filtering

On Australia Day 2010 hundreds of websites faded to black as part of Rudd Labor's Great Australian Internet Blackout.

The Government's filter will restrict our right to choose and cedes parental supervision.

Rudd Labor promises to legislate to block access to websites 'refused classification' by the Australian Communications and Media Authority but the 'blocked' list won't be publicly available.

Rudd Labor says the filter will protect our children from offensive content online but can't explain how. It rides roughshod over internet vagaries, and proper roles for law enforcement and parental supervision.

Dissemination of child pornography, sexually violent material and racial hate is deplorable and, rightly, illegal. But just as you can't buy illicit drugs from the supermarket, you don't find illicit material on popular blogs, or mainstream websites.

The criminal underworld of Australian society operates largely 'under the radar', as does the criminal underworld of the internet.



Labor's legislation makes police of internet providers, blocking any website on the 'blocked' list. But how will a filter stop illicit material in areas where it's most prolific?

Experts say the greatest risk lies in the corners of the internet immune to filters: private file sharing networks, email and conversations in private internet chat rooms.

A leaked version of the 'blacklist' last year showed websites of a tourism operator and a Queensland dentist, listed alongside others containing child pornography, rape and extreme violence.

Yet what a filter will do is give false security to hopeful parents; seduced by Government spin and wanting to believe their children are safe to explore online, free from a watchful eye or guiding hand.

The Coalition isn't convinced that mandatory filtering will be effective. Let's see independently audited filtering trial results, and hear from experts in the field before deciding.

Educating parents in internet dangers and sensible supervision will go a long way to protecting children, as will supporting our police and intelligence agencies to better combat criminal activity online.