



...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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Broadband for the Bush on a slow boat to nowhere

The divide between the health of people in rural and remote Australians and that of people in metropolitan areas is likely to widen if the faults identified in the roll-out of the National Broadband Network are not fixed.

“The NBN was initially meant to give all Australians access to high-speed broadband,” David Butt, Chief Executive Officer of the National Rural Health Alliance, said today. “Sadly this is not going to be the reality for more than 40% of Australian households, according to NBN Head Bill Morrow.

“And that is particularly concerning for those rural and remote users on fixed wireless and satellite broadband services who are among that 40% of households.

“There is overwhelming evidence that people who live in rural and remote Australia tend to have lower life expectancy, higher rates of disease and injury, and poorer access to and use of health services than people living in major cities.

“The NBN was supposed to provide at least part of the answer to these problems. But based on Mr Morrow’s advice to Senate Estimates yesterday the divide could get even worse as people in cities and major centres reap the benefits of fast speed internet while people in rural and remote areas do not.

“This impacts access to health, education, business and other services that require fast internet access. As Governments look to save money by moving away from face to face services, using portals to access services is made much harder with slow internet speeds.

“The Australian Government should be mandating minimum service obligations to ensure universal access to high speed broadband and telecommunications coverage in rural and remote Australia. – there needs to be recognition of what is needed to tackle the complexities and opportunities of improving health services in rural and remote areas.

“This might mean Governments need to put more resources into supporting access in rural and remote communities, for example by investing savings from reduced face to face services in urban areas into supporting better access in the bush.

“Seven million people live outside the major cities in Australia and they generate about 67% of Australia’s exports. They need reliable high-speed broadband to participate fully in national life. This isn’t a matter of supporting lifestyle choices – Australia needs these people where they are doing what they do for the good of the nation.”

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The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health. Its vision is good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.