

Telecommunications

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS, IT AND BROADBAND MODERN ECONOMY

Failure to invest in broadband has put Australia's social capacity, economic growth, e-commerce growth and our future competitiveness at risk - particularly in regional and rural Australia. Effective service across Australia can only be ensured through Government creating a more effective regulatory environment for telecommunications infrastructure investment.

The Howard government has done next to nothing to challenge Telstra's tactics to delay competition so they can retain their monopoly position. Since privatisation Telstra has played the government and the regulator to achieve their own means. And Labor doesn't look like standing up to Telstra either.

Democrats Action Plan

"The Democrats believe that government leadership in facilitating and supporting all Australians to access affordable, fast, reliable, broadband is crucial if Australia is to flourish in the 21st century"

**Senator Lyn Allison
Spokesperson
on Telecommunications**

- Remove the structural impediments to competition through the restructuring of Telstra and by giving the regulator effective divestiture powers (as recommended by ACCC and OECD).
- Implement a well funded National Telecommunications Strategy with targets and timeframes for the supply of affordable broadband to all Australians.
- Priority strategy actions are the roll out of an open access Fibre to the Node (FTTN) infrastructure to replace existing networks and either fibre or wireless solution to every home and business. If need be the FTTN to be publicly owned.
- The National Telecommunications Strategy to be funded through the future fund and meeting a risk free rate of return equivalent to bond rate.
- Regulation of the network to ensure fair and open access to all telecommunication players.
- Federal Government funding support for local councils to facilitate broadband access in their communities. All new housing estates should be fibre.
- ACMA to audit and report on price and service standards for consumers including internet, broadband and SMS data charges
- Specify in legislation/regulations minimum service requirements for broadband access and minimum broadband speeds. To be reviewed annually for advances in technology, needs of users and capacity for industry to deliver.
- Introduce new laws to protect the rights and privacy of people on line, including: a ban on spyware, restriction of government access to digital information providing at least the same level of protection as afforded non digital information.



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- Introduce new laws to reduce monopoly behaviour and ensure technology interoperability. Promote the uptake of new technologies such as VoIP and broadband, which have the potential to reduce call costs by 50% or more in the long-term.
- Create an equalisation fund, in place of Universal Service Obligation (USO), with the objective of providing all Australians equal access to telecommunication services. ACMA to undertake annual technology reviews as to the most appropriate means of supplying telecommunication services to rural areas (eg satellite, radio).
- Teach Information Technology (IT) in all classes alongside english and mathematics. This education should include safe internet use and on line protocols and behaviours i.e. the file sharing of copyright files.
- The Minister to guarantee Telstra does not turn off CDMA until the Next G network was up and running. No CDMA customers to be left stranded in the transfer to NEXT G without being paid damages.
- Use all regulatory, planning and procurement processes at the government's disposal to promote competition and structural separation in IT and telecommunications sectors. Including stopping exemptions under State planning laws, no USO subsidies.
- Amend competition law to put the onus on all integrated carriers to prove the case that new product, technologies and services are competitive where the ACCC considers there exists anti-competitive conduct.
- ACMA and ACCC to report annually as to progress towards the achievement of competition in the area of telecommunications and IT.

The Issues:

Achieving an affordable, reliable and efficient telecommunications system, two things are needed - a robust regulatory framework to allow true competition and fair access to all telecommunication players as well as consumer protection through price, technology and service standards.

Where it is in the public interest competition must be promoted and this can only be achieved through regulation to ensure that Telstra the dominant player does not misuse their market power.

Promoting new market telecommunication entrants will stimulate innovation and consumer choice and result in an efficient, cost effective, secure, equitable service levels for rural and regional Australia.

The last thing we want is for Telstra to increase their stranglehold on consumers. We need a government that is prepared to take on Telstra and sort out the regulatory mess and promote greater competition in all sectors.



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