

## INTERNET THAT WORKS FOR ALL

### A publicly owned, fit-for-purpose 21st century internet that everyone can access

The NBN is a critical piece of infrastructure that every Australian should have access to. We rely on the internet to work, study, socialise, and buy and sell things. Yet not everyone has access to a good quality or affordable connection, and the digital divide is increasing.

The Australian Greens have a plan to bridge the digital divide, so that everyone living in Australia can participate in our digital economy.

#### THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ **Fix the NBN by 2025** with the best fibre and 5G wireless technologies to secure our economy, jobs, education and health.
- ▲ **Make the NBN more affordable** for everyone
- ▲ **Provide free internet** for people with a Health Care/Low Income Card
- ▲ Ensure the **NBN remains publicly owned**.
- ▲ **Close the digital divide** for disadvantaged and regional communities
- ▲ **Protect your digital rights** with a Digital Rights Commissioner

## FIX THE NBN USING BEST CHOICE TECHNOLOGY

Australia's internet is lagging behind the rest of the world. It is slower and less affordable than comparable countries.

Australia is ranked last out of the 36 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on entry-level fixed-broadband affordability<sup>1</sup>.

We also rank 65th globally for internet speed, at just over 51 megabytes per second (MBps), which puts us behind comparable countries and many Pacific Rim countries<sup>2</sup>. The fastest country for internet speed is Singapore, at just over 198 MBps. That's nearly four times faster than Australia!

Despite a recent \$3.5 billion 'upgrade', one in four Australian homes and businesses will still be unable to access high-speed broadband<sup>3</sup>. This user-pays, so-called upgrade will do little if anything to bridge the digital divide. The Coalition's \$57 billion multi-technology mess is driving costs up, affordability and coverage down, and customers are moving to competing privately and foreign-owned mobile networks.

The Greens are committed to a fit-for-purpose NBN that uses Fibre to the Premises, Fibre to the Curb, and 5G Fixed Wireless to prepare us

for the future and bring us in line with the capabilities of other countries.

Australians need a 21st century internet to support our future economy, jobs, education, health, and way of life. The Greens have a plan to finish the NBN as it was originally designed, using the best long-term technology solutions, and making it available to all Australians - not only those who can afford it. Under our plan, Fibre-to-the-Node (FTTN) connections will be replaced with Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) connections, to achieve 93 per cent FTTP coverage in the NBN network by 2025.

Poor internet connections are costing Australian businesses over a 100 hours in lost productivity per worker, per year<sup>4</sup>. If we do nothing, this will only increase with forecast rapid growth in ICT jobs and more than half of all employed Australians wanting to maintain or increase the amount they currently work from home since the COVID pandemic began<sup>5</sup>.

## QUALITY, AFFORDABLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR ALL

NBN's wholesale pricing structure is a key factor in slow speeds and high prices for consumers. Exorbitant wholesale prices are passed on by telecommunications companies to consumers. This leaves many people unable to afford an NBN connection, turning to mobile broadband alternatives instead, and many

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<sup>1</sup>Coughlan M 2019, *Australia has most expensive broadband among OECD nations, says new report*, Australian Associated Press, Sydney

<sup>2</sup>Speedtest Global Index 2022, *Global Speeds March 2022*, Ookla, Seattle

<sup>3</sup>NBN Co 2021, *NBN Co announces suburbs and towns where 900,000 more homes are eligible for a fibre upgrade by ordering selected plans*, NBN Co, Sydney

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<sup>4</sup>Digital Reviews Network 2021, *Poor Internet Connectivity Costs Aussies 100 Hours a Year in Lost Productivity*, Digital Reviews Network, Mentone

<sup>5</sup>Deloitte 2021, *ACS Australia's Digital Pulse Future directions for Australia's Technology workforce*, Deloitte Access Economics, Sydney

others have to opt for slower and cheaper NBN products,<sup>6</sup> therefore missing out on the full potential of their connection.

This digital divide is growing at a time when more and more people are working from home<sup>7</sup> and in ‘the cloud’ due to COVID-19 and increasingly flexible work arrangements.

Telecommunications must be regulated as an essential service, including fixed-line, mobile, and broadband services, to ensure it is not a driver of socio-economic disadvantage.

This is why the Greens will:

- Provide free fast broadband to all holders of a Health Care Card/Low Income Card, to ensure digital inclusion of some of the most vulnerable people living, working, and studying in our communities;
- Require a transparent review of NBN pricing structures during the next Parliament so retailers provide consumers with the best possible options and ensure affordable base-rate broadband packages are available to households under financial stress;
- Update the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code to drive better customer service and industry practice; and

- Empower the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman to facilitate complaint resolution.

## BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE WITH FREE INTERNET FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

Internet access can no longer be considered a luxury. The Greens believe access to the internet in Australia – one of the richest nations in the world<sup>8</sup> – is a basic human right.

With more and more Australian government services and commercial businesses moving away from bricks and mortar, or clicks and mortar, to internet-only – even before but especially since the COVID-19 pandemic – a reliable internet connection is now a necessity for all Australian households.

However, despite the COVID-19 pandemic requiring people to rely on the internet more than ever before to work, study, socialise, shop, and pay their bills, Australia’s digital divide is actually increasing, with one in ten Australians now considered digitally excluded<sup>9</sup>.

Without internet access, people are increasingly excluded from connecting with family and friends, paying bills, accessing telehealth, applying for jobs, and accessing school, vocational, and university program delivery. This digital divide is entrenching generational disadvantage, which disadvantages our society and economy as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup>Branley A. 2020, *NBN structure means those who can afford the least pay the most*, ABC News, Sydney

<sup>7</sup>D’Angelo Fisher L. 2021, *Working from home becomes part of the permanent employment landscape*, Australian Financial Review, Sydney

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<sup>8</sup>Vergara, K. 2021, *Australia among the richest nations*, Financial Standard, Sydney

<sup>9</sup>Morris-Reade R. 2022, *Pandemic accelerates adoption but widens digital divide*, IT Brief, Sydney

The Greens have a plan to provide free standard speed broadband internet plans to every low income household with a Healthcare card.

This investment will cost \$8.7 billion over the decade. The Government will subsidise internet service providers (ISPs) with a standard rate for these low income household plans, to be negotiated with ISPs collectively.

This investment to bridge the digital divide will break intergenerational disadvantage and enable social connectivity between people who are at risk of being isolated.

Internet access is now as necessary as water, electricity, and healthcare. Much like bulk billing of medical services, under our plan for an internet that works for all, the Australian Government will provide a wholesale rebate to Retail Service Providers (RSPs) for the provision of basic standard speed plans to households with a Health Care/Low Income Card.

## KEEP NBN INFRASTRUCTURE PUBLICLY OWNED

Under the original NBN legislation, its sale would have been triggered automatically five years after its completion.

The Greens secured safeguards during the drafting of NBN legislation to make it as difficult as possible for future governments to privatise the NBN by ensuring any move to sell it off is subject to a full public inquiry and vote in Parliament.

The government paid \$11 billion to bring Telstra's networks back into public hands to

establish the NBN<sup>10</sup>, but the Morrison Government has said it will consider selling the NBN after this election<sup>11</sup>.

The NBN is a critical foundation infrastructure of 21st century Australia. The Greens will retain the NBN infrastructure as a public asset and ensure it remains in public hands as Australia's sole universal-access, wholesale telecommunications service provider.

## REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS THAT ARE FUNDED, FAIR, AND FIT FOR PURPOSE

Rural, regional and remote communities are receiving less for their money compared to urban areas and are often unable to access sufficient data to conduct their business, educate their children, and access essential services online<sup>12</sup>.

Problems associated with the oversubscription of satellite services and downgrades from existing ADSL have resulted in slow and unreliable internet connections which has amplified during COVID lockdowns<sup>13</sup>. NBN Co's solution is to throttle fixed wireless services across its limited bandwidth in regional Australia by restricting online activities such as peer-to-peer file sharing, software and game

<sup>10</sup>Thompson J. 2011, *Telstra Signs \$11b Deal with NBN*, ABC News, Sydney

<sup>11</sup>Coorey P. & Smith P. 2020, *Coalition's \$4.5b NBN backflip improves sale chances*, Australian Financial Review, Sydney

<sup>12</sup>Branley A. 2020, *NBN structure means those who can afford the least pay the most*, ABC News, Sydney

<sup>13</sup>Braue D. 2020, *Regional Australians still living an NBN nightmare*, Australian Computer Society, Sydney,

patches, VPN traffic and 4K ultra-high-definition video. These problems will only worsen for regional Australia, as the technology they are provided with isn't fit for purpose.

The Greens will ensure that regional communities receive telecommunication services that are comparable in cost, quality and reliability to urban areas by:

- Ensuring families and businesses, no matter where they are, can access enough data to meet their needs at a fair price;
- Using the best available technologies, including fixed wireless and fixed line services (with satellite the technology of last resort, where no other options are possible);
- Committing \$3 billion to re-establish the Communications Fund (in perpetuity), which was abolished by the Rudd Government in 2008-09, to fund essential communications programs with a focus on regional Australia to ensure access to communications services are equitable with metropolitan areas;
- Auditing mobile coverage performance across regional Australia and redesigning the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) as per recommendations by 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review;
- Ensuring regional communications funds and schemes deliver WiFi Mesh services to small and remote

communities that are ineligible for the Mobile Black Spots Program or Community Phones Program (as successfully trialled in the Tjuntjuntjara community); and

- Expanding the ACCC Broadband Monitoring Program to include Fixed Wireless and Satellite.

## PROTECTING YOUR DIGITAL RIGHTS

Debates about digital rights in Australia have mostly been reactive; to the mandatory data retention scheme, identify and disrupt powers, and the COVIDSafe app. Those discussions have often centred on the false choice between individual privacy or national security. Now we are facing ongoing threats from the government that they will continue to undermine encryption and extend their mass surveillance regime to include biometrics such as facial recognition through their so-called National Driver Licence Facial Recognition Solution. We need to be proactive, not just reactive, about protecting our rights to privacy.

With a commitment of \$2.1 million over the forward estimates (\$7 million over the next ten years), the Australian Greens plan for digital rights includes a Digital Rights Commissioner within the Australian Human Rights Commission, which will serve both as an advocate in response to existing law, and proactively as new law is proposed. The Commissioner will ensure that concerns about safety, accessibility, privacy, and security are addressed as legislation is being developed, not half-heartedly considered after legislation is introduced. They will work with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and the

Privacy Commissioner, but without the statutory limitations the Privacy Commissioner faces.

The Commissioner will be a watchdog and arbiter to ensure that human rights held by people offline are protected online, in accordance with a unanimous 2013 UN General Assembly resolution<sup>14</sup>, which recognised the need for special measures for all states to review their obligations in light of rapid technological change and to establish or maintain oversight and accountability of all State surveillance of communications, their interception, and the collection of personal data. They will work to scrutinise legislation and will advise governments, departments, and the general public on the effect of proposals, programs, and legislation on digital rights and responsibilities, focusing on accessibility, privacy, and security for all Australians.

## FIND ALL OUR POLICIES:

[greens.org.au/platform](https://greens.org.au/platform)

## PAYING FOR OUR PLAN

By making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of tax and winding back handouts to big polluters, we can build a better life for all of us.

1 in 3 big corporations pays no tax and many big corporations and billionaires send their profits offshore tax free.

The Greens will tax billionaires with a new 'billionaires tax', require big corporations making excessive profits to pay a 'corporate super-profits tax' and axe billions of dollars in handouts to the coal, oil and gas giants that are driving the climate crisis.

These measures have all been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

When big corporations and billionaires pay their fair share, everyone can have the services they need for a better life.

<sup>14</sup>United Nations 2014, *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013*, UN, Geneva