

COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT DIGITAL STRATEGY 2.0

INTRODUCTION

The provinces of Nelson and Tasman derive most of their economic wealth from the primary sector. The region has significant support infrastructure including science, technology and production businesses. The regional economic development agencies and Network Tasman Limited have invested significant effort into improving broadband infrastructure in the region and were successful with an application for funding from the Broadband Challenge Fund. The grant has been invested in extending the regional optic fibre network and the project will be completed when the Nelson and Marlborough Internet Exchanges are commissioned.

The Draft Digital Strategy 2.0 has been reviewed by the Nelson Regional Economic Development Agency (NREDA) and has been found to be a constructive document; however, we do not believe that enough focus has been placed on the development of rural broadband. We believe improved rural broadband is a critical element for harnessing economic development in the 21st century.

We have a number of points that we believe will improve the strategy, they are described below.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Chapter 2. We believe that the addition of the fourth enabler, collaboration, will enhance the other three enablers of connection, confidence and content. NMI's success so far has been based on an initial investment by a local utility company (Network Tasman Limited). This initial investment has been supported by Broadband Challenge Funding. We believe that the Government needs to encourage investment by non-telco players. Private and public sector collaboration in investment in additional fibre in our region will be the basis for connecting more of our businesses and people. The issue of Government bonds may be a method to introduce new investors.

Chapter 3. The 'new goal' for 'connection' needs to be more specific and include broadband being available to New Zealanders working and living in rural areas. Symmetrical bandwidth is of critical importance. More detail should be added to the second key priority, that of 'facilitating the deployment of high-speed broadband infrastructure'. The Government needs to work closely with local authorities to make this possible. Consideration needs to be given to permitting Transpower optic fibre to carry commercial data flows; this may be best undertaken by adjusting the RMA. A project focussed on this should be included as one of the 'Connection Actions'.

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The concept of 'open access' needs to be further elaborated here and should not only include fibre but ducting as well.

Chapter 4. We believe that more emphasis should be directed at the business sector as the base for the country's economic development. The first of the capability priorities and challenges needs to be expanded to include primary sector business people and teachers/trainers. We think that developing digital literacy in schools is far too important to leave to voluntary sector organisations, the Ministry of Education needs to be charged with delivering this as part of the general curriculum.

Chapter 5. We endorse the link to the New Zealand Digital Content Strategy. Digital business priorities should be given precedence over digital culture.

Chapter 6. The inclusion of 'collaboration' is a major enhancement to the digital strategy. A key area to foster collaboration is local government and they need to be empowered to provide the necessary facilitation directly or through appropriate agencies. The work being undertaken on the Digital Communities Action Plan is a good first step however; the plan's implementation will require resourcing. There needs to be a 'whole of government' approach to this so that individual ministry policies do not inhibit collaboration between other departments, the public and business sectors unnecessarily.

Chapter 7. The model 'Achieving our digital potential' adequately summarises the strategy. More emphasis needs to be directed to the primary sector in section 7.2, this is an area that needs to be resourced and an appropriately qualified team be tasked with developing a series of actions that will actively support improvements in primary production with the use of digital technologies.

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