

18 May 2009



Victorian Bushfire
Reconstruction and
Recovery Authority

Backhaul Blackspots Branch
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601

By email: backhaulblackspots@dbcde.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Backhaul Blackspots Initiative – Victorian Bushfire Communities

Following the terrible Black Saturday bushfires that afflicted numerous Victorian towns on 7 February 2009, VicUrban has engaged with the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) to consider how VicUrban's skills in deploying fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) might be applied as part of the reconstruction of devastated communities.

VicUrban is the Victorian Government's sustainable urban development agency committed to delivering prosperous and successful communities in regional and metropolitan Victoria.

VicUrban has successfully deployed fibre-to-the-home at Aurora in Epping North, and is currently expanding our FTTH deployments to new residential and industrial developments across Melbourne. VicUrban warmly welcomes the announcement of the National Broadband Network, and the Federal Government's allocation of substantial funding to delivering this nationally important infrastructure.

VicUrban submits that activities arising from the Backhaul Blackspots Initiative funding that proceeds in or near fire damaged communities ought to be conducted in conjunction with the infrastructure recovery works currently being planned by VBRRA. This would:

- Ensure bushfire communities are rebuilt with infrastructure that not only provides access to quality telecommunications services, but opens up opportunities for delivery of future bushfire warning systems;
- Demonstrate early delivery of NBN outcomes to consumers;
- Focus investment in Provincial Victoria and peri-urban Melbourne, and
- Align with the Victorian bushfire reconstruction infrastructure program.

1. Locations

The communities that are within the scope of this submission are

| Fire region |
|---|
| <p>Kinglake Complex (including communities of Arthurs Creek, Eagles Nest, Humevale, Kinglake Kinglake Central, Kinglake East, Kinglake South, Kinglake West Pheasant Creek, St Andrews, Strathewen Upper plenty, Whittlesea Buxton, Granton, Healesville, Marysville Narbethong, Toolangi Castella, Christmas Hills Chum Creek, Dixons Creek, Glenburn Murrindindi, Steels Creek Tarrawarra, Yarra Glen Clonbinane, Heathcote Junction, Kilmore East Reedy Creek, Strath Creek, Wandong Waterford Park, Break O'Day, Flowerdale Hazeldene, Hazeldene South)</p> |
| <p>Churchill – Jeeralang (including communities of Callignee, Callignee North, Callignee South Churchill, Devon North Gormandale, Hazelwood Hazelwood North, Hazelwood South, Jeeralang, Traralgon South, Koornalla Traralgon, Jeeralang Junction)</p> |
| <p>Beechworth (including communities of Silver Creek)</p> |
| <p>Bendigo (including communities of Maiden Gully, Long Gully, Iron bark, California Gully, West Bendigo)</p> |
| <p>Weerite / Camperdown</p> |
| <p>Horsham (including communities of Drung and Haven)</p> |
| <p>Coleraine</p> |
| <p>Ferntree Gully</p> |
| <p>Redesdale</p> |
| <p>Bunyip State Park (including communities of Drouin West, Labertouche, Jindivick Neerim, Longwarry North)</p> |
| <p>Narre Warren (Lynbrook and Harkaway fires)</p> |
| <p>Muskvale</p> |
| <p>Delburn Fire (30.1.09) (including communities of Yinnar, Boolarra, Darlimurla, Allambee Sth, Dollar & Mirboo Nth)</p> |

The total number of houses that could be within the scope of a bushfire recovery FTTH deployment is approximately 3 100, accommodating houses that have been completely destroyed, partially destroyed, or are in communities that were fire impacted. This volume of houses can be further refined, with analysis focusing on making investments that deliver services to the optimum number of residents and businesses.

Whilst some of the areas listed are served with existing backhaul and various forms of internet connectivity, a significant opportunity exists to deploy a FTTH network in conjunction with the broader bushfire recovery program. Co-ordinated deployment of FTTH infrastructure in conjunction with the construction of other services and infrastructure presents the most economically efficient outcome for NBN rollout.

2. Design and operational services

VicUrban makes no submission in relation to the design and operation of fibre network, but suggests that services to be delivered are defined from a consumer perspective. Specifically, VicUrban suggests that services that should be available include:

- Fixed line telephony
- High speed broadband, preferably with symmetric, or near symmetric, service
- Free to air television
- Subscription television
- Video on demand

Free-to-air television is of particular significance in many of the bushfire damaged areas such as Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale, as the local geography renders poor reception for free-to-air television using typical domestic aerials. A subterranean precinct-wide solution to improving free-to-air television coverage would be very welcome in many of the impacted communities.

Similarly, mobile telephone coverage is intermittent in many of the bushfire impacted areas.

3. Operational and ownership arrangements

No submission is made on this topic.

4. Further information

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this submission further, and can be contacted on 03 8317 3400 or at sam.sangster@vicurban.vic.gov.au.

Yours faithfully

Sam Sangster
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