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SECOND DEPUTY SPEAKER
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**Contribution to the
Blackhaul Blackspots Initiative Stakeholder Consultation Paper**

The Maranoa electorate covers an area of 546,850 sq kms, stretching from Cunningham's Gap in East Queensland to the Northern Territory and South Australian borders. As the Federal Representative of a predominantly rural electorate, which encompasses a number of remote towns such as Windorah, Birdsville, Bedourie, Jundah, Stonehenge, Eromanga and Quilpie, I have a deep understanding and appreciation of the benefits optic fibre would bring to these communities.

Microwave links have adequately served rural and remote Australia in the past but along with satellite phones this technology is fast becoming archaic and obsolete. Optic fibre is the most viable option to replace current technology and will offer many benefits to rural and remote Queensland. In turn, this upgrade to optic fibre will have a positive flow-on effect on the national and state economies, as far Western Queensland makes a significant contribution to the primary and resource industries.

With a total of more than 11 million head of cattle, Queensland shares with the Northern Territory a dominant role in Australia's billion dollar beef industry¹. In 2006, Queensland produced 1.05 million tonnes of beef and veal and in the 2004/05 financial year, the gross value of Queensland cattle and calf production equalled \$3.61 billion². Queensland also makes a significant contribution to the wool and sheep industry. The gross value of Queensland sheep and lamb (excluding wool) was \$49.9 million (based on 2004/2005 figures) and in 2005, Queensland produced 27,481 tonnes of wool³. An optic fibre network would provide exciting new opportunities for food producers in far Western Queensland and assist with the speed of business negotiations and financial transactions.

Far Western Queensland also makes a significant contribution to the state's tourism economy. Last year approximately 71,000 visitors travelled through the remote town of Birdsville. In 2007, there were 1.5 million visitors to Queensland's outback region, who spent \$435 million and stayed a total of 4.3 million nights⁴. Having optic fibre internet would make a significantly benefit local tourism providers, attract more tourists and assist with the safety and security of travellers on remote roads.

¹ 'Agricultural Resource Kit', National Farmers' Federation, 2007; 'Brisbane to Darwin Corridor Strategy', a joint initiative of Queensland Transport, Queensland Government Main Roads, Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2006

² 'Agricultural Resource Kit', National Farmers' Federation, 2007

³ 'Agricultural Resource Kit', National Farmers' Federation, 2007

⁴ Regional Tourism Profile 2007 of the Outback Region, Tourism Research Australia, August 2008

Far Western Queensland is fast becoming a key player in the mineral and renewable energy industries. The town of Windorah boasts a solar power station, the first of its kind in Australia, and the Cooper Basin is also home to exciting new developments with 'hot rocks' geothermal energy, offering the potential to provide Australia with a carbon-neutral, renewable energy resource⁵. The Cooper Basin is also rich in oil and gas resources, and boasts one of Australia's largest onshore oilfields⁶. Locally based resource companies would benefit substantially from optic fibre capability.

Socially, the benefits of an optic fibre network are many. Optic fibre would allow improved access to information and educational opportunities for distance education teachers and students. It would also provide vital support for the Royal Flying Doctor Service through improved telemedicine technology and high definition diagnostic capability.

As a priority for the Australian Government, I propose an optic fibre loop between the far Western towns linking:

- Birdsville to Boulia via Bedourie;
- Birdsville to Windorah via Betoota;
- Windorah to Quilpie via Eromanga;
- Windorah to Stonehenge via Jundah;
- Stonehenge to Yaraka via Isisford and Emmet;
- Barcaldine to Muttaborra via Aramac;
- Winton to Cloncurry via Kynuna and McKinlay (along the Landsborough Highway).

These optic fibre networks would also link with the major regional centres of Longreach and Mt Isa.

This spider web of interconnecting links will mean if one link fails consumers will be able to access another cable loop, improving network reliability and extending reception. The laying of an optic fibre skeleton frame by the Australian Government would allow all participating telecommunication service providers access to the fibre, thus creating competition and in turn providing affordable prices for consumers in rural and regional areas. Optic fibre also has a long technological life, and should be compatible with future technologies. The installation of an optic fibre network for the communities of Far Western Queensland will provide an immediate economic stimulus through improved communication channels for business, provide a significant benefit to schools, local governments, police stations and rural health services, and will herald a new era for Australian telecommunications.

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Federal LNP Member for Maranoa

⁵ Annual Report 2007, Geodynamics Limited, <http://www.geodynamics.com.au>

⁶ 'Large oil find in Cooper Basin', ABC News, 2 October 2007