

ers are able to access NBN services is a year.

ON THIS DAY 10 YEARS AGO: FROM THE COMMSDAY 2004 ARCHIVES

Telstra embarked on a campaign to redeem itself in the eyes of the industry and the regulator over the telco's broadband pricing, ahead of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's decision to either drop or escalate its competition notice... Shin Satellite claimed a major victory in for its IPSTAR satellite broadband subsidiary with the signing of a major contract for the delivery of services in New Zealand, one of its principal target markets... Optus reaffirmed its targets for the 2005 financial year, with incoming CEO Paul O'Sullivan telling investors that the telco aimed for double-digit growth in operational EBITDA.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR FROM PROFESSOR REG COUTTS

The recent 'war of words' on NBN

I was the 'wireless expert' on the expert panel of 2008/09 that laid out a way forward to realise a truly national broadband infrastructure. I don't recall Rod Tucker referring to himself as the 'lead qualified expert' panellist, as Grahame Lynch states in his extensive comment on Rod's NBN keynote presentation, but in my view the main challenge that comes out in this 'war of words' is the failure to distinguish between the right vision and consideration of implementation options.

My vision of the enabling national broadband platform is a network of networks inclusive of the competitive mobile networks. Wireless access both complements and relies on fixed broadband infrastructure. Wireless/mobile developments are exciting, but one can't dismiss the challenge of opening up appropriate spectrum as an 'artificial constraint' on a wireless broadband 'vision', as government lethargy or alternatively a inspired plot to raise money.

Most of the NBN debate has been on the technology platform for the 93%; a truly national vision included for the first time in our history the other 7% using advanced wireless and future satellite. The review of the NBN Implementation Study Report done subsequently shows some 25% of the envisaged \$43 billion would address this often neglected 7%. As they say they usually have to be content with the "trickle down jive"!

Consideration of possible implementation options back in 2008/09 could not be separated from the then-toxic relationship between government and Telstra, the owner of the copper network.

While most FTTN options were mature and well known, any such intermediate implementation options were not possible. Implementation options should be open to change reflecting economic circumstance, player attitudes and technology developments, but the vision should remain clear. In fact I would take an opposite view to Rod when he reportedly said: "the former government's plan had failed to resonate with citizens"! Many commentators on the 2010 election said the NBN vision was a key point of difference that resonated with citizens and key support of independents and why the current government's focus on a more effective implementation options while retaining the vision is the challenge and my plea as one of the 'parents of the NBN vision'.

My observation, in deference to Graham's warning of the perils of the involvement of 'vertical experts' whose company I relish: I support Rod's plea that engineers not see politics as the exclusive club of lawyers and economists debating key national issues. However, I am sure we can do better at framing the public debate to balance vision and realisation.

Reg Coutts