

Fast internet promised

BY CAMPBELL WALKER

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REGIONAL Australians will pay no more than metropolitan areas for the same quality service under the national broadband network, Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy told Tamworth residents.

Senator Conroy launched the new ABC News Radio 91.7FM frequency in Tamworth yesterday morning before sitting in and participating in the telecommunications forum organised by Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Speaking at the forum, Senator Conroy said the Federal Government had improved on its original election promises, as the national broadband network had started to take shape.

“Now we can say that 100 per cent of Australians will have access to 12Mbps or better broadband internet access,” Senator Conroy said.

“What we don’t reach by the optical fibre network, we will reach with satellite and wireless and maintain and provide over and above the targetted 12Mbps speed.”

Senator Conroy said while there was criticism from some in metropolitan areas, the Government remained committed to levelling the communications playing field.

“This is unashamedly and explicitly a cross-subsidy to deliver equivalent services to all Australians,” he said.

“My ambition is that there will be the same wholesale price for every household for the same speed across satellite, wireless and fibre-to-the-node. This is about bringing every Australian up to speed, so to speak, after years of Australian telecommunications being far slower and more expensive than most of the rest of the world.”

He said the benefits to the entire country would be significant, but even more keenly felt in regional areas.

“We estimate that the disparity in telecommunications services costs regional areas more than \$3.2 billion and 33,000 jobs a year,” he said.

“Just the roll-out of the national broadband network is going to provide some 25,000 jobs annually, but the long-term implications of improved access to information are

astounding.”

Mr Windsor agreed, labelling the Government’s telecommunications policy the gutsiest and most ambitious stand he had seen in Parliament.

“Telecommunications are the roads and rail of the future,” Mr Windsor said.

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Tuning in: ABC News Radio Drive presenter John Barrow, left, and Communications Minister Stephen Conroy celebrate tuning into the new ABC News Radio frequency in Tamworth yesterday. Photo: Geoff O'Neill 210909GOC04

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