



MEDIA RELEASE

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A PEDESTRIAN LABOR BUDGET FOR A DYNAMIC SECTOR

Internet safety a low priority as razor gang strikes

Labor's first Communications budget is a very pedestrian effort for such a dynamic and rapidly evolving sector.

Disturbingly the Government is abolishing the Protecting Australian Families Online package of internet safety and policing measures and re-branding it as a Cybersafety Plan with a reduction of \$37.2 million over five years, including the removal of \$2.8 million of Australian Federal Police funding to combat online child sex exploitation and to promote international cooperation.

Labor's vague plan to construct a national broadband network also remains mired in uncertainty with no clear funding source identified in tonight's budget to support its \$4.7 billion election promise.

The Government is rolling in money with a \$21.7 billion surplus, yet plans to pay for its broadband promise with unprincipled raids on the \$2 billion Communications Fund and \$2.7 billion from the Futures Funds.

Raiding the Communications Fund, which was established by the previous government to provide for the future telecommunications needs of rural, regional and remote Australia is totally unnecessary and as previously stated will be opposed by the Opposition.

As a result, Labor should have allocated stand alone funding of \$4.7 billion in the budget to underwrite its broadband election commitment. It has failed to do so and if Labor cannot get its finances in order – and historically it has failed dismally to do so – it has nobody to blame but itself.

While the broadband promise is referred to, no funding has been specifically allocated for roll out, with provision only included in the "Contingency Reserve".

The people of rural, regional and remote Australia, who have been denied fast and affordable broadband by the end of 2009 by the Rudd Government have been further let down by tonight's budget.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy culled the OPEL wireless broadband project which would have seen \$958 million of Government funding targeted at delivering equitable new services to the nation's most disadvantaged consumers.

Despite having absolutely no alternative to OPEL, the Government has allocated an inadequate \$270.7 million over the next four years to support the continuation of the successful Australian Broadband Guarantee Program.

This program provided subsidies for satellite broadband and also funding for innovative broadband projects in rural, regional and remote parts of the country. The previous Government established the ABG to provide a lifeline to rural, regional and remote Australia until programs such as OPEL were realised.

All Labor has is a vague promise to deliver pure fibre to the node broadband to 98 per cent of the Australian population within five years. It has no plan whatsoever for the other 2 per cent.

Labor's Communications' Budget also failed to provide:

- Substantial new funds for practical measures to facilitate the transition to digital television including \$82 million in additional funding for the ABC to establish a children's digital channel.
- Insufficient funding to address digital television blackspots, including infrastructure upgrades to ensure communities are not disadvantaged by the switch to digital.
- A support package for community television stations, including a clear plan for their conversion from analogue to digital and increased funding support to ensure their survival in the interim.
- Significant new infrastructure funding for the roll out of digital radio, in addition to the \$10.5 million allocated in the 2007-08 budget, but instead flagged plans to delay digital broadcasting by six months.
- Increased annual funding to the ABC of about \$70 million a year to insulate it against Labor's planned new local drama content quota of 120 hours a year.
- Clear evidence of the \$20 million in savings the minister claimed he was going to deliver simply by changing the name of Digital Australia, to the Digital Switchover Taskforce.

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