

The Wrap

Tell us more on NBN progress

Improved reporting sought on rollout.

The federal government and NBN Co need to be more transparent and accountable for the progress of the National Broadband Network rollout, according to a parliamentary committee reviewing the \$35.9 billion NBN.

The Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network has made 15 recommendations in its third report, focusing largely on a need for proper benchmarking and improved reporting of information.

Tabling the report in parliament, committee chair Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) questioned comments made by NBN Co that rollout targets contained

in the 2011-2013 corporate plan were no longer valid.

“The committee found that this statement and the absence of corporate plan targets in the shareholder ministers’ performance report means targets are not able to be compared between performance reports,” Mr Oakeshott said.

Since the first corporate plan was released in 2010, NBN Co has fallen behind its targets for premises passed, which they blame on the time taken to finalise negotiations with Telstra. NBN Co has since revised its corporate plan earlier this year, stating “if there are any future policy changes, the assumptions

in the new corporate plan would have to change”.

Mr Oakeshott was concerned that any future targets would be rendered unreliable as soon as there was any change to the NBN rollout environment.

“The committee does not find it meaningful to be provided with data on how many premises have been passed or premises made active between periods or years without any kind of target or benchmark on which to compare this data,” he said.

“And more significantly, if revised NBN rollout targets will be subject to change without warning, this will mean there is no way of gauging the progress of the NBN rollout in relation to costs expended on the public infrastructure project.”

The committee recommended that the shareholder ministers’ report include key performance indicator information for targets in the business plan for homes passed, homes connected and services in operation. •

Question Time

Question

What is a matter of public importance and how is it chosen in the House of Representatives?

Answer

A matter of public importance (MPI) is an opportunity to discuss any issue which is considered to be of public importance or urgency. It is one of the principal avenues available to MPs to initiate immediate discussion on a matter which is of current concern.

The MPI procedure was developed from a provision in the standing orders adopted in 1901 which permitted a member to move formally the adjournment of the House for the

purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance.

A member may propose an MPI on any sitting day, except Monday, by writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives by 12 noon. If the Speaker determines the matter proposed is in order, that is a definite matter of public importance, it is announced to the House where it must be supported by at least eight members for discussion to take place. If more than one matter is proposed for the same day, the Speaker gives priority to the matter which he or she believes is the most important.

The MPI takes place following the presentation of documents and ministerial statements, shortly after Question Time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

A maximum of one and a half hours is allowed.

The proposer and the member next speaking are each allowed 15 minutes to speak and any other member is given 10 minutes. The subject matter of the discussion does not attract a vote of the House as there is no motion before the chair.

While technically any member may initiate a matter for discussion, in practice ministers would not be expected to use the procedure (and have not done so), as there are other avenues available to them to initiate debate on a particular subject. MPIs are generally recognised as an avenue for shadow ministers and backbench members to raise issues, with the great majority of matters discussed proposed by members of the opposition executive. •

Do you have a question?

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