

ICT Policy Forum – Breakdown

The National Broadband Network (**NBN**) is a key point of difference between the parties in a tight election race. Today the Coalition finally released details regarding its broadband plan. To make things interesting the Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Tony Smith MP, Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Senator Scott Ludlam, Greens ICT spokesperson went head-to-head in the ICT Policy Forum Technology entitled Powering our Economic Future hosted by the Australian Computer Society. The Forum saw each party flesh out details regarding their respective ICT policies and dish some dirt on their opponent's policies. The Maddocks' NBN team spent their lunch break watching the Forum and dissecting the key differences. All the highlights (and below the belt comments) are neatly set out below.

	Labor	Coalition	The Greens
Broadband	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government established company (NBN Co) to build and operate a new super fast NBN. - NBN will connect 90 percent of all Australians with speeds up to 100 megabits per second (100 times faster than those currently used). - Remaining premises will be connected with next generation wireless and satellite technologies that will deliver broadband speeds of 12 megabits per second. - \$43 billion over 8 years to build the NBN (although the Implementation Study has said this can be done for less.) - Senator Conroy argued that fibre was the "gold standard" and would ensure Australian businesses would be able to compete in "ways they never have before." - Senator Conroy strongly made the point that the Coalition's plan to use objects to HFC cable and DSL services would not support many of the NBN applications (such as video conferencing). - On the Coalitions alternative policy Senator Conroy described as a "blast from the past." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Coalition released its alternative plan which consists of a total of \$6.3b of investment for a private sector network. - The alternative network would have peak speeds of between 12Mbps and 100Mbps for 97% of premises by 2016. However, in the Forum Shadow Minister Smith was unable to answer the questions "If the minimum speed is a peak speed of 12Mbps, what is the actual speed one is likely to receive." - The \$6.3b alternative plan includes \$2.75b to extend the fibre-optic network; \$750m to improve DSL services; and \$2b for improved rural regional and metropolitan wireless networks. - Shadow Minister Smith focused on the \$43 billion price tag of the Governments NBN and said the Coalition's private sector focused policy was "supportive not prescriptive" and "appropriate and targeted." - Shadow Minister Smith said that the Coalition's policy would focus on "backhaul, competing technologies and competition bottlenecks." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In principle support the Government's NBN policy. - The key difference is that the Greens do not support the sale of NBNCo in five years time and argue that company should stay in public hands. - Senator Ludlum argued in the Forum (in concert with Senator Conroy) that "we will do things with this technology which we have not yet imagined." - Senator Ludlum argued that the nation needed one reasonable service and not a patchwork service as being offered by the Coalition.



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Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill (Telco Bill)	In addition to the NBN, the Government introduced the Telco Bill back in 2009. The Telco Bill has three key parts: addressing Telstra's vertical and horizontal integration; streamlining the access and anti-competitive conduct regimes; and strengthening consumer safeguard measures. Senator Conroy confirmed its commitment to the Telco Bill and described the structural separation of Telstra as the "holy grail of telecommunications reform."	Shadow Minister Smith confirmed the Coalition would not support the Telco Bill in its current form because the Coalition would not support the separation of Telstra as proposed under the Bill.	Senator Ludlum indicated the Greens ongoing support for the Telco Bill (subject to certain amendments). He described the reformed "parked" in the Senate as a "missed opportunity" which has set back competition in the telecommunications industry "over a year".
Filtering	Senator Conroy defended the Government's universally unpopular internet filtering proposal arguing that similar technology was already being deployed in a number of countries including the UK and Canada.	Shadow Minister Smith slammed the Government's filtering proposal and outlined that the Coalition's focus on undesirable content would include 60 million dollars worth of funding for PC based filtering as well as greater education around the issue.	Senator Ludlum said the Greens did not support the Governments' internet filtering proposal and went on to describe how he was recently at technology conference where one of the speakers demonstrated a number of ways in which the proposed filtering technology systems could be circumnavigated by "any teenager".
Green ICT	Senator Conroy argued that the NBN would deliver a reduction of carbon emissions using the example of people being able to work from home thereby reducing carbon emissions. Senator Conroy stressed the same results could not be used using the technologies relied on under the Coalitions plan.	Shadow Minister Smith acknowledged the contribution the ICT sector could make to the reduction of carbon emissions and referred back to the Howard Government's initiatives to promote these initiatives.	Senator Ludlum said the Greens supported the Australian Computer Society's policy statement regarding Green ICT and said the ICT sector had an important role to play in helping all sectors reducing emissions.
Best Quote	Directed at Tony Smith: "If you can't imagine what you will do with 100 megabits then it's a failure of your imagination."	Directed at Senator Conroy: "Can you stop interrupting, I know you're a Collingwood supporter, but this is ridiculous."	Senator Ludlum getting all Sci-Fi: "The NBN will link Australians to 'Planet Earth.'"

