



## Put Some Speed Into NBN

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The National Broadband Network (NBN) should ultimately go down as one of the worst conceived policy projects in Australian history.

On these pages recently Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese criticised the Coalition's approach to the NBN while acknowledging that it "helped Australians to work from home during Covid."

If Labor had have won the 2013 Federal Election and its fibre to the premise plan had continued, more than 40% of the rollouts would have been incomplete by the beginning of 2020, that's according to the 2013 strategic review of the NBN. Meaning with a crystal ball, millions of households would have been left behind during the Covid pandemic.



Families would have been left with either no broadband at all, or slow legacy connections averaging 8 megabits per second (Mbps) if Labor's plan hadn't of been drastically changed by the 2013 election result. So Albo's "Do it once, to it right, do it with fibre" tagline wouldn't have been much use for Australians forced to work or learn from home during the pandemic.

Labor's latest NBN policy makes it clear they'd like to continue using the NBN as a political football, continuing the charade that their NBN policy wasn't a monumental failure and was somehow superior to the Coalitions NBN.

No country has essentially re-nationalised their telecommunications network as Australia did with the creation of the NBN, which exposed taxpayers to eye watering costs blowouts and unnecessary risks.

The original mandate of NBN Co was to roll out fibre to 90% of premises, regardless of the cost. It was established in haste by the Rudd government in 2009, after the failure of its original plan to tender for the creation of a fibre to the node network to the private sector (most likely to Telstra).

In retrospect it should have ignored unelected bureaucracies like the ACCC and had Telstra do the work for them, as was their original intent.

However, Labor Leader Anthony Albanese presented a fundamental shift in their policy on the National Broadband Network.

In his policy announcement and splashed across social media Labor says "The NBN is public property, we'll keep it that way."

The statement of intention setting up the NBN in 2010, signed by Stephen Conroy and Penny Wong, proposed the "eventual privatisation" of the NBN and instructed how that would occur once the NBN is built and fully operational.

Stephen Conroy and Labor in government when they were setting up the NBN often trumpeted the return on investment would be once the NBN was privatised. "The NBN business model establishes that taxpayers are paid back their investment with a modest return by year 15 of the project on the basis that privatisation is completed," that was Stephen Conroy in 2010.

So what Mr Albanese is admitting, is that after billions of dollars of taxpayer money spent, taxpayers will get no return on investment at all.

Whether it be Telstra, Qantas or Commonwealth Bank, former government entities have prospered in private hands, and have been able to flourish and employ Australians in a



competitive market.

The privatisation of CSL in 1994 in another privatisation success story, it would have been almost impossible for it to be able to have manufactured the AstraZeneca vaccine here in Australia were it still owned and run by the Commonwealth.

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd cheered on Mr Albanese's announcement, which puts a lie to his own media release as Prime Minister on 7 April 2009 which said, "The Government will make an initial investment in this company but intends to sell down its interest in the company within 5 years after the network is built and fully operational."

But when asked on ABC RN whether the announcement meant that he completely ruled out privatisation when the project is completed, Mr Albanese couldn't provide a clear answer.

Mr Albanese says "Scott Morrison's B grade NBN denied millions of Australian families and businesses the full benefit of broadband." But is that actually correct?

While Labor's policy of fibre to the home would enable speeds far in excess of 150mbps, residential fibre can deliver 1 Gigabit per second. The vast bulk of Australian users are happily on between 50-100 megabits. Most Australians are comfortable with their speeds and aren't willing to pay any extra for faster internet.

Mr Albanese says: "Hindsight shows [Scott Morrison's] cynical opportunism denied millions of Australians early access to useful technology and cost taxpayers billions of dollars in extra costs.

Billions of dollars in extra cost? Under the six years Labor was in office it spent \$6 billion on the NBN and connected just 51,000 premises to it, that's \$117,647 per premise. I'm not sure Mr Albanese should be lecturing on extra costs.

Over a decade later, with billions of dollars spent, now is the time to proceed with privatisation of the NBN to realise its potential.

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