



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Australian Broadband Advisory Council's Riding the Digital Wave: Report on COVID-19 trends**

The Australian Broadband Advisory Council (the Council) is proud to release its first report, *Riding the Digital Wave: Report on COVID-19 trends*. The report sets out the Council's approach to reviewing the adoption of broadband across key sectors of the economy, and the priorities for its initial program of work to support economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

The Council notes that Australia is emerging from an unprecedented social and economic challenge, which has tested the strength and performance of our broadband infrastructure. With millions of Australians moving to work and study from home and also rely more heavily on mobile connectivity, that combination of fixed and mobile infrastructure has demonstrated that it is effective, resilient, and will remain a critical part of supporting Australia's economic recovery from COVID-19.

Minister for Communications Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP said "Our 2013 decision to roll out the NBN quickly, then phased upgrades around emerging demand, has served Australia well. It meant the NBN was available to almost all Australians when COVID-19 hit, giving us high speed connectivity at home when we needed it most."

Chair of the Council, Ms Deena Shiff said "Digital transformation using broadband has been given a new impetus as a result of COVID-19. Looking ahead, our focus will be on industries where there is high potential but as yet unrealised economic and social benefits from riding this digital wave."

The Council has identified e-health, digital innovation in agriculture, and the digital transformation of the construction sector, as the focus of its initial work program. In consultation with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Agriculture, the Council has established its first two expert working groups, for health and agriculture technology (agritech).

The health expert working group will consider how e-health, including how telehealth can enable new models of care. The agriculture expert working group will consider opportunities to stimulate agritech digital adoption and remove barriers associated with digital infrastructure to realise these opportunities. Research underway to develop a Digital Foundations for Agriculture Strategy will provide input to the work of agritech expert working group.

In parallel, the Council will work with agencies across government to ensure coordination and alignment between projects. For example, the Council will collaborate with the Digital Skills Organisation to pilot new initiatives for digital capability building in the regions, especially for small businesses that need foundation learning pathways to upskill their workers so they can keep their jobs and sustain their businesses.

The Council will also encourage the development of more effective digital planning tools at the local and regional level. This will enable better gap analysis and will also enable consideration of how digital clusters in regional Australia might be created from a range of existing programs to give critical mass to the local digital skills base.

The Council will also consider ways to support digital inclusion for the unconnected and for vulnerable groups, including a greater focus on the use of wi-fi in public spaces.

## **Background**

The Council was established by the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, in July 2020 to develop advice for Government on ways to maximise the economic and productivity benefits of increased broadband connectivity across key sectors.

Ms Deena Shiff is the chair the Council, and is joined by six other eminent Australians who have extensive experience in the communications sector and industries across the economy, including Dr Bronte Adams AM, Mr Martin Haese, Mr Scott Lorson, Mr Jan Müller, Ms Georgina Somerset AM and Mr Zareh Nalbandian.

The Council will provide advice to Government on:

- ways the NBN and other high-speed networks can boost Australia's economic output
- opportunities to increase the use of the NBN and other networks in business
- any barriers to using the NBN and other networks, including financial and cultural/behavioural issues, and cost effective strategies to reduce such limitations
- potential implementation, communication and outreach strategies.

*Riding the Digital Wave: Report on COVID-19 trends* is available at:

[www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/internet/australian-broadband-advisory-council-reports](http://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/internet/australian-broadband-advisory-council-reports).

More information on the Australian Broadband Advisory Council and the Terms of Reference is available at: [www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/broadband-advisory-council-established](http://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/broadband-advisory-council-established).