
Regional Backbone Blackspots Program Network Construction Now Underway

Nextgen Networks ('Nextgen') today commenced physical construction of a significant optical fibre network that will provide competitive broadband facilities to regional cities, towns and communities across Australia.

The project commencement comes less than 3 months after Nextgen was announced as the winning tenderer for the Australian Government's \$250 million Regional Backbone Blackspots Program (RBBP).

The landmark occasion is being marked with a formal ceremony in the North Western Queensland centre of Mount Isa.

"An extensive period of network design, land access negotiations and procurement has been undertaken to enable construction to begin," Phil Sykes, Managing Director of Nextgen said.

"Today marks the start of a program of works that will see a large construction workforce deployed around the country, tasked with laying the backbone cables linking many regional towns that do not receive competitive broadband today.

"These works will be undertaken by our project partner Visionstream Pty Ltd," Mr Sykes said.

Visionstream is Australia's pre-eminent telecommunications network contractor, having rolled-out and maintained more than 100,000 route kilometres of national fibre assets, including areas throughout regional Australia.

The task of building the network requires world class engineering capability, an experienced and well trained workforce backed by best-practice occupational health and safety arrangements. It involves heavy machinery that can operate effectively in some of the most hostile terrain in the world and an understanding of heritage and environmental considerations along each route.

As part of its successful tender to the Australian Government, Nextgen presented a rapid network construction phase to bring forward the economic benefits of competitive broadband facilities.

It is significant that the construction of this network will begin in Mount Isa. In a broadband environment, competitive backbone transmission facilities mean population centres once considered as remote towns can utilise competitive, high capacity links to connect to the rest of the country.

"More than 162,000 people along this 3,835 kilometre individual route north to Darwin and south to Toowoomba will be key beneficiaries of the Australian Government's investment in this infrastructure," Mr Sykes said.

"It is the technical and economic benefits of broadband that will enable a thriving industrial and commercial centre like Mount Isa to participate fully in an National Broadband Network world" said Mr Sykes.

Nextgen looks forward to collaborating on this project with the Australian Government's Rural National Broadband Network Co-ordinators, service providers and local communities to ensure that the RBBP objectives are fulfilled. This will be achieved by:

1. Improving telecommunications services and pricing outcomes in key regional centres where there is presently no backbone network competition; and
2. Providing next generation facilities for an National Broadband Network environment to ensure non-metropolitan users can also share in the benefits of a high capacity broadband environment.

As a nationally scaled operator with Australia's third largest long haul fibre network, Nextgen has a proven track record and is well placed to undertake this project.

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About Nextgen:

Nextgen owns and operates the 3rd largest long haul optical fibre network in Australia with established fibre routes from Brisbane to Perth. It is a specialist transmission services provider to telecommunication carriers and service providers, corporations and government. It does not sell services to consumer or residential customers.

Nextgen is wholly owned by Australia's largest project development and contracting group, Leighton Holdings Limited.