

The Australian

Technology

Gunnedah hooks up to high speed Wi-Fi using 30-year-old optic-fibre cables

- by: By Vikki Campion
- From: The Daily Telegraph
- December 05, 2011 12:00AM

WELCOME to Gunnedah, population 12,000, 440km from Sydney - and the first Wi-Fi town in Australia.

IT walks like the NBN, talks like the NBN - but is about \$40 billion cheaper.

Welcome to Gunnedah, population 12,000. It's 440km from Sydney and is now the first Wi-Fi town in Australia.

Instead of waiting years for fibre optic cables to be laid out to their doorsteps while small surrounding communities were left unconnected, the council teamed up with a new company to deliver high-speed Wi-Fi internet to doctors, patients, school students and every business in town.

The main street boasts free Wi-Fi as the new pilot scheme connects to the web using fibre-optic cables that were laid three decades ago.

Prior to Wi-Fi, the only options for the town were slow dial-up or pricey satellite internet.

Now video conferencing is allowing doctors to talk to patients at home, the mayor to confer with emergency services during storms and students to connect to the school curriculum from home.

Gunnedah Mayor Adam Marshall said it would allow Gunnedah businesses to have high quality internet without the broadband cost.

"We can save the government a heap of money but they are only going to bring it (the NBN) to the edge of town anyway. This uses the existing fibre optic and we can provide that cover to every home in Gunnedah," he said.

Mr Marshall said the scheme could hook up any community with fibre optics.

"You could argue that it can negate the need for NBN Co to be rolling it out in these communities," he said.

TUPS Company managing director Geoff Peach said the NBN forgets about 7 per cent of people in the most remote areas.

"There is a massive advantage for the population in having high speed broadband - it's just the delivery I am confused about," he said.

"I think if the approach that we had taken in Gunnedah was taken in every town we would save a great bit of money."

A spokesman for Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said Wi-Fi would not be as fast as fibre-optic broadband.

"The Wi-Fi service is shared by many users, which causes a decrease in speed for every user accessing the service and is influenced by other factors which also significantly decrease speeds," he said.

"Fibre to the premises technology is the state-of-the-art, future proof, fixed-line broadband technology that provides consistent speeds to all users. This is why it was chosen."

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