

NBN study to be released this week, Conroy confirms

Communications minister Stephen Conroy has confirmed that the long-awaited NBN Implementation Study will be released this week. Addressing an Irish trade and investment mission in Melbourne yesterday, he said he expected “more colourful and robust debate” once the study is available.

“There’s been a lot of speculation on the study, most of it ill-informed, and I’ll have more to say on that later in the week,” he told the breakfast meeting. “It examines the government’s coverage, commerciality and competition objectives, as well as the detailed operating arrangements of NBN Co Limited, its ownership and structure, and longer-term privatisation.”

The trade delegation included Ireland’s Minister for Trade and Commerce, Billy Kelleher, who noted that telecommunications is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Irish economy, especially in exports, while he also pointed to the A\$2 billion in revenues generated by the country’s software sector.

Senator Conroy noted that the two countries shared a strong focus on broadband access led by the public sector. “Both Ireland and Australia recognise the importance of having in place a strong government policy to reap the benefits of high speed broadband,” he said.

“Both governments recognise the opportunities that the digital economy will present, and we are ensuring we have the infrastructure in place to take advantage of it,” he said, noting that last year Ireland published a framework for the transition to next generation broadband. The framework included the promotion of private sector investment and targeted government actions.

The communications minister also told the delegates that the telecommunications reform package now before the Senate was aimed at bringing more immediate gains to the industry compared to the longer-term goals of the NBN. He also noted that it was “not just about Telstra” as had been suggested in commentary.

“For too long we’ve been held back compared to our OECD competitors,” he said. “And if you look around our region FTTH has seen the biggest change.”

“While the NBN gets the market structure right for the long term, we cannot wait for that progressive eight-year rollout to reform the sector,” he suggested.

Meanwhile, a number of delegates that CommsDay spoke to during the breakfast briefing suggested that Australia is now seen as one of the most promising markets globally in the telecom sector.

“Looking around the world, it’s one of the great opportunities,” said Davy Lacy, APAC head of sales for NewBay Software, which this week is signing a deal with an unnamed Australia telco.

Lacy said that the fact that Australia had largely avoided the brunt of the global recession, as well as the many cultural similarities with Ireland, had also attracted many companies to doing business here.

Geoff Long

