$265 MILLION MESSAGE TO SENATOR SCULLION

At least $265 million is required to bring the Northern Territory’s telecommunications infrastructure up to scratch ahead of the full privatisation of Telstra, Chief Minister Clare Martin said today.

“The Territory Government has been unequivocal in its opposition to the sale of Telstra,” Ms Martin said.

“However, with Canberra apparently determined to push ahead with the disposal of its majority stake, I will be writing to the Prime Minister detailing what is required to bring our telecommunications infrastructure up to an acceptable standard.”

Ms Martin said the Government had also offered Territory CLP Senator Nigel Scullion a full briefing.

“Senator Scullion has a responsibility to Territorians to argue the case for ‘catch-up’ funding,” Ms Martin said.

“We have seen what Barnaby Joyce was able to do for his Queensland constituents. I now call on Senator Scullion to ‘do a Barnaby’ and fight for the funding the Territory deserves.

“There are gaps in our services right across the Territory, from Darwin to our remote communities.”

In Parliament last month, Communications Minister Dr Chris Burns outlined the findings of an independent report which said nearly $100m was required to bring telecommunications services up to scratch in the Territory’s remote communities.

Today, the Government sent a copy of the ACIL Tasman report to Senator Scullion.

As well as the $97.8 million to supply telecommunications services to 60 remote communities, the Government is seeking:

- $50 million to supply appropriate telecommunications services and technology to approximately 80 remote communities, each with fewer than 100 people;
- $85 million to build fibre optic infrastructure between the Territory and South Australia, providing competition to the existing Telstra-owned link;
- $15 million to deliver remote “telehealth” videoconferencing services;
- $2 million to plug gaps in urban ADSL broadband services;
- $10 million to supply education ARNET broadband links; and
• $5 million to deliver “smart home” technology via fibre optic networks.

“Our argument for the $265 million is based on equity,” Ms Martin said.

“We have to correct the major gaps in our urban telecommunications network.

“And the disadvantages suffered by people living in remote communities can be overcome by making available the economic and social benefits that telecommunication services provide to the vast majority of Australians.”

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