

FIBRE OPTIC rolled out in West Arnhemland

A major landuse agreement between the Northern Land Council and telecommunications company Telstra has illustrated how quickly the negotiation process can operate when traditional owners are a central focus.

A proposal for the roll-out of optic fibre cable by Telstra in Arnhem Land was received by the NLC in May 2007 – 14 months later in July 2008 all consultations and negotiations with traditional owners were completed.

Telstra has just completed laying an optical fibre cable between Jabiru and Nhulunbuy (via Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak and Yirrkala) – a distance of approximately 800kms.

The cable will provide increased capacity to 8000-10,000 people in Arnhem Land for mobile telephones and broadband internet for schools, clinics and individuals in the region, and will be a much more reliable method of communication than the existing radio system.

Traditional owners issued two construction licences to permit Telstra to clear a corridor of up to 10m in width and install the cable 1.2 metres in depth.

Under the agreement, traditional owners are on-hand to monitor construction whenever the cable route crosses Restricted Work Areas (RWA)s which cover sacred sites or other areas of significance.

Traditional owners, such as Jacob Nayinggul, of Gunbalanya, have been employed as expert Aboriginal consultants, monitoring any works conducted within 50m of a RWA.



Above: Connie and Moses Nayinggul at one site and inset: Connie showing a piece of optic fibre

Mr Nayinggul said the project would enable the region's children to better access educational information and enhance mobile phone coverage.

He said it would improve future opportunities for his daughter, Connie, and grandson, Moses, who helped Jacob monitor construction near Cahill's Crossing.

The NLC has also ensured that there is provision for the employment of local ranger

groups to conduct monitoring activities to ensure weeds do not spread as construction takes place.

The Aboriginal communities of Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) - Maningrida, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala - and the township of Nhulunbuy are now connected.

Minjilang, Waruwi, Milingimbi and Galiwinku will be connected after the dry season in 2009.

Remote communities to lose TV and radio by 2013

Remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory have been warned that all television and radio broadcasts will be phased out by 2013 – with no news on what will replace it.

The issue was raised at a recent board meeting of Alice Springs-based Imparja Television.

Imparja Television chief executive officer Alistair Feehan said that the situation is of serious concern.

"We have lobbied the government and the other remote area broadcasters to try to get a more holistic implementation of digital broadcasting, which would mirror the services currently being delivered (and planned) by the commercial broadcasters in metropolitan and regional areas," Mr Feehan said.

Northern Land Council representatives on the Imparja board, Samuel Bush-Blanas, and Jacob Lansen, said many Aboriginal people in remote communities would be shocked to learn about future changes to their television service.

"People in the remote parts of the Northern Territory rely on these services, and it is a concern if those services

were lost and not replaced with an appropriate service," Blanas, who was recently elected Imparja deputy chairman, said.

Next year, the new platform in broadcasting, digital, will be rolled out, with the current analogue system being phased out by 2013.

Aboriginal residents are being warned that when analogue services cease by 2013, there are no plans for the provision of replacement digital services at 250 'self-help' remote locations.

'Self-help' locations are ones using equipment owned and operated by the local community or council, with the satellite signal downlinked and re-broadcast as an analogue television transmitter.

When first introduced, digital services were little more than a slightly wider screen version of the analogue service.

These days it comprises an en-



Imparja board members l-r: Joe Clark, Adrian Nelson, Jacob Lansen, Samuel Bush-Blanas, Wilton Foster, Marilyn Smith, Graham Smith, Graham Dowling and Peter Ross

hanced, integrated, widescreen and high definition multi-channel service.

Federal regulator Australian Communications and Media Au-

thority (ACMA) has signalled it will call a meeting of all remote area broadcasters in the near future to discuss the issue.