

# INFORMATION

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## Technology behind NBN is moving to warp speed

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The political tussle over how much speed is enough to sate consumers of a future national broadband network has intensified after infrastructure provider and Leighton subsidiary Nextgen Networks said it would use rates of 100 gigabits per second to service regional black spots.

Nextgen will today demonstrate technology it says will lift data carriage speeds by about 10 times the existing industry standard of fibre optic backhaul.

The live demonstration in Melbourne comes as Labor continues to push the point to independent MPs that its more expensive vision for national broadband is justified because it will serve Australia's needs well into the future.

The demonstration is likely to take some heat off NBNCo chief Mike Quigley, who was criticised for promoting the potential for 100 gigabit speed on the NBN early during the election campaign.

The Coalition has proposed a \$6 billion alternative broadband plan which proposes wireless technology running at a minimum of 12 megabits per second rather than optical fibre technology in many regional areas.

Significantly, the Coalition's plan would allow Telstra to retain its vertically integrated structure rather than divesting its wholesale

copper network into the NBN.

Nextgen is a key player in the NBN because it has been awarded a \$250 million deal to roll out optical fibre backhaul to regional black spots across mainland Australia.

The company has also expressed strong interest in bidding for further work under Labor's proposed \$43 billion NBN plan.

Nextgen chief executive Phil Sykes said while the big boost in speed was welcome, the real breakthrough was that internet protocol packets, the base unit of data, could be manipulated and sorted at the same speed at which they are carried down a pipe.

The ability to manipulate and process packets at speed is a key factor in networking performance because it allows different kinds of data, particularly video, to be given a guaranteed fast lane if necessary.

"That's not been done before at the 100 gigabit per second level," Mr Sykes said. "We can see it delivering great benefits to rural [and] regional Australia as well as interconnecting capital cities."

While there was a role for wireless technology because service could be established very quickly, backhaul was still a requirement.

"Most of the wireless base stations in Australia today have got a fibre optic cable to them and if they don't there is one probably planned to get there," Mr Sykes said.