

# Australia govt expands proposed broadband network

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(AP) -- Australia's government expanded its ambitious plan to bring broadband to much of the vast country, adding 300,000 homes and businesses to the coverage area Friday in hopes of winning votes in next month's federal election.

The opposition has already pledged to ax the expensive, high-speed fiber optic network, known as the National Broadband Network, if it takes power in the Aug. 21 election.

The plan previously promised to deliver high-speed access to 90 percent of Australian homes and businesses, but Prime Minister Julia Gillard pushed its coverage Friday to 93 percent, turning the Internet plan into a campaign platform.

"The choice today couldn't be clearer: I will build the [National Broadband Network](#). (The opposition) will not," Gillard said.

Australia trails behind other industrialized nations in terms of accessibility and cost of broadband Internet. The vast size and sparse population of the country increases costs of the infrastructure needed for high-speed Internet.

Campaigning in the western city of Perth, Gillard emphasized that the high-speed fiber optic network would create 25,000 new jobs and facilitate modern education that would keep [Australia](#) competitive against other nations.

"I simply don't understand why (the opposition) thinks it's a wise idea for children in this nation to get an education not of the same standard as children in Singapore," Gillard said. "To make sure our children get a world-class education, they need access to world-class technology."

A trial of the network, which is expected to take eight years to complete and estimated to cost 43 billion Australian dollars (\$38.6 billion), began in three towns in Tasmania earlier this month.

The opposition fears the cost could exceed AU\$80 billion, and Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott has said he would scrap the plan if his party takes power.

"We all want to see better broadband, more affordable broadband," Liberal communications spokesman Tony Smith told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio. "But we make no apology for not matching Labor's monumentally reckless spending in this regard."

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