

Letters

Give Future Fund starring role

Let me commend *The Australian Financial Review* on two Telstra articles on July 15 on the proposed national broadband network and the role that Telstra is likely to play.

Dominic White's "Old copper flaw in PM's pipe dream" raises the obvious risks that any government proposal now faces unless it engages with the owner of the main telecommunication assets in this country, namely Telstra.

And while Communications Minister Stephen Conroy can talk of grand visions, the reality is there are no quick fixes. Short of details and far from being transparent, Senator Conroy will need all his regulatory power to prize these assets off the incumbent.

But it seems even the competitors don't know what the government is offering. What they want is access to Telstra's copper network without contributing any capital to its upkeep. Fortunately, some have now cottoned onto the fact that if Conroy wants to take these assets off Telstra, they need to pay for it with figures of \$20 billion-plus quoted in your article.

Further, as Stephen King's "Equal access vital to network's success" notes, the danger in what Rudd and Conroy are proposing is that it may work well in the short run but what happens when the government disposes of its controlling stake in the new network to the next set of unsuspecting investors?

Perhaps I could provide a solution.

The government-owned Future Fund run by David Murray could sell its 16 per cent stake in Telstra, use those proceeds plus kick in some billions more to buy Telstra's copper network to guaranteed the NBN won't flop.

Murray could then own and run this wonderful, monopoly asset for all Australians, rather than trying to influence Telstra matters from the sidelines and without the consent of all shareholders.

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