I am deeply concerned that "market-based pricing" is being considered for public spectrum.

My (rushed) comments are as follows:

a) In the urban context charging for public spectrum is an absolutely sure way to kill creativity - not just at the technology level - but across all of the sectors of society on the fringes that are significant change agents in our society.   
  
<http://www.creativeclass.com/richard_florida> contains two videos that are worth watching on the importance of creativity, and access to free spectrum is part of that creative process in many cases. The arguments might seen obtuse to someone steeped in traditional learning and corporate/government culture, but without OPEN access to the basic tools driving a 21st century economy, the economy will falter. Telstra has already compromised Australia by buying up assets (land/spectrum), and using them to prevent competition, which of course cripples innovation. Enough is enough!

b) To me the regions are the foundation of our economy. But the regions are underserved by a failed telecommunications market and there are no plans that I know of to address the situation. (NBN Satellite is NOT a solution, and neither is the Telstra monopoly - both are being driven by engineers and both are killing innovation in the regions.)    
  
As an example of what you can do with public spectrum in the regions, I put together the following project overview while I was working in the Mid West region of WA - the wireless component for the ENTIRE PROJECT could run on PUBLIC SPECTRUM and save Australia hundreds of millions of dollars. Here is a link to a video presentation: <http://youtu.be/Rs5aOe4qJQE>   
  
c) In a world with a rapidly changing environment, we need all of the innovative edges we can muster. Basic Darwinism makes it obvious that it is not how big you are that determines whether you survive, it is how quickly you can adapt. The dinosaurs in charge of the failed telecommunications market (i.e. NBN and Telstra) cannot adapt fast enough to help Australia cope with climate change - but the people on the fringes of technology development quite possibly can - and free access to public spectrum is a key to helping them help the rest of us survive - just ask some of the people relying on public spectrum to help save the drought-ridden Rangelands of WA how important public spectrum is!   
  
c)  As a specialist in regional economic development, with a strong background in technology, I know that ANY financial impediment that reduces access to pubic spectrum will have significant and severe negative implications on the future of Australia i.e. more of the same failed marketplace is NOT going to result in the kinds of changes needed for this country to innovate its way out of what is essentially a commodity-based, price-taking, future. Allowing open source development at low/no cost on the fringes can.  
  
To me the idea of privatising public spectrum is a penny wise, pound foolish, notion. In my comments above I have (hopefully) been able to outline how important the public spectrum is as an innovation tool and just ONE instance of how public spectrum could be used to save Australia hundreds of millions (and quite possibly billions) of dollars. And, of course, help us manage our way forward in a rapidly changing climate.

Please note: I found out about Spectrum Review 3 days prior to the closing date. I have not had time to put forward a more considered response. I am now based in Moss Vale NSW - about 2 hours drive from Canberra. If you would like to meet in person about the proposed changes, please get in touch.

Noel Ferguson

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