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Digital Economy Strategy Team

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GPO Box 2013

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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Digital Economy Strategy

The following comments capture some brief points that I would like you to consider in developing the digital economy strategy. They are from my perspective as a citizen immersed in digital technology, a former newspaper editor attuned to the public mood and an author of a recent book, Wake Up – The Nine H#shtags of Digital Disruption. Its overall theme is to identify the ongoing elements of disruption and to call for greater alertness by the public and consolidated leadership from government.

This is a private submission but is also based on work I do as Director, Corporate Transition of QUT where I run the Real World Futures program designed to enliven interest in the impact of disruption.

I would encourage that your strategy pursues five outcomes. They are:

1. Greater awareness of the depth of disruption and its impact from the personal to the global. My observation is that awareness of its impacts remains limited to that in the view of the individual – their job, their home life, their entertainment etc. The same "siloed" awareness applies to leaders in public life who choose to focus on the aspects that matter to them;

2. Clearer understanding of the work scenarios if technology follows a foreseeable course over the next five years. The estimates of impact on future employment range from below a 20% impact over the next 15 years to close to a 50% impact. There is agreement on the skills that will matter to limit personal impact but no agreement on how to enhance those skills in the education system, a matter I have written about for The Conversation;

3. Consideration of the role of government in creating an ethical framework for technology that can substitute for the human mind. This is difficult to confront but governments in Australia have recently demonstrated an appetite for social issues such as same-sex marriage and assisted death. The ethics of building machines capable of human thinking are equally worth considering;

4. How technology can both improve access to and cost of delivering government services. The public is rightly sceptical after the Census problems but the scope for technology to deliver better healthcare/ welfare services/ traffic data/ weather forecasts etc, etc is truly exciting.

But it appears to be looked at in a piecemeal way when a clear roadmap of what to expect when would better inform and educate the public and allow businesses to make investment decisions;

5. Delivery of renewed economic growth to regional cities – either by using technology to redeploy workforces from metropolitan areas or identifying and building technology based industries that can service global markets from regional areas. Technology revolutions in the past (the spread of rail through north America) have created wealth in new regions. We are at a point where policy needs to address how this can happen in Australia.

The above outcomes are predicated on what we should take as givens – that the National Broadband Network will function as promised and that we can be confident of digital security.

A great deal of work on this has been done across government – in particular I refer to the recent work of the Productivity Commission which eyes some of the gains from technology in the health and education sectors and the work of Data 61 on tomorrow's Digitally Enabled Workforce.

This is deliberately not a detailed submission. You will have plenty of those. But it is a call to focus on outcomes that will set Australia up for what is to come and for this consideration to include all aspects of government policy.

Congratulations on your efforts so far and best wishes with this project

David Fagan

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