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Media release

From the Minister for Information and Communication

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MULTI-MILLION OPTIC FIBRE NETWORK CONNECTING VICTORIAN RESEARCHERS TO THE WORLD

The Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Marsha Thomson, today announced details of an advanced state-wide fibre optic network that will revolutionise the way the Victorian academic and research community communicates and collaborates with the world.

Victorian Universities, the CSIRO along with Victorian and Australian governments established the Victorian Education and Research Network (VERN) which will link up to 200 research and education sites throughout Victoria via an optic fibre network delivering super-fast 'broadband' services.

Ms Thomson said the initiative ensured that Victoria's research and education community remained at the forefront of e-research.

"E-research is about arming scientists and researchers with the technology and infrastructure to collaborate, providing access to knowledge, expertise and tools that will encourage new and innovative scientific activity," she said

"VERN will enable academics, researchers and students to send and receive data at speeds of up to 40,000 times faster than the average home broadband connection.

"It will also place researchers in isolated parts of the State on equal footing with their urban counterparts and colleagues around the world."

Funding for the VERN has come from direct investment by Victoria's nine universities and the CSIRO, matched by funding and in-kind support from the Victorian and Federal governments.

Mr John Carruthers, CEO of VERNet, the company established to deploy and manage the network, said it was an essential investment for modern academic research.

"VERN will tap into up to 200 locations across Victoria through 2,000km of optic fibre. It will link to national networks (such as AREN, the Australian Research and Education Network), and to global education and research communities in the US, Europe, Asia and other regions," he said.

"VERN is a generational investment by the universities, the CSIRO and government to ensure that their communications infrastructure is world-class. It is also a commitment to keep Victorian know-how at the forefront for the next two decades.

"VERN is an important collaboration that will help researchers in a variety of fields ranging from cancer research to analysing drastic weather phenomena such as cyclones and typhoons."

The Victorian Government's contribution consists of an arrangement with the State rail authority, VicTrack, to provide access to its \$21.5 million-517km fibre optic network – also used to provide signalling for the Regional Fast project.

Minister for Transport Peter Batchelor said that the 'double' use of the fibre optic network was a smart use of existing infrastructure.

“VERN is the first organisation of its kind to be provided with access under a commercial arrangement to the entire regional fibre optic network.

“The use of Regional Fast Rail cabling for the rollout of VERN is a prime example of the Bracks Government's *Broadband Framework*, utilising public infrastructure assets to support strategic broadband projects,” he said.

VERN will cover much of metropolitan Melbourne and key regional areas in Victoria, particularly East Gippsland, the Latrobe Valley, and, initially, six regional precincts: Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Geelong, Wodonga and Werribee. Other towns will be linked in later stages.

Rollout of the infrastructure program is underway throughout regional Victoria and is due to be completed by early 2008.

For more information about this and other ways the Victorian government is making broadband happen, visit the Broadband Access Office www.mmv.vic.gov.au/broadband