Fifield, Nash return to comms, Tehan picks up cybersecurity

Communications minister Mitch Fifield and regional comms minister Fiona Nash have both retained their positions in prime minister Malcolm Turnbull’s new frontbench, while Liberal MP Dan Tehan will take on the role of minister advising the PM on cybersecurity.

The telco industry has broadly welcomed what many stakeholders see as a move that will bring continuity, and a chance to push ahead with a number of major and involved issues in the comms portfolio. And Tehan’s appointment has garnered particular praise following his work chairing the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.

Fifield will retain both the communications and arts portfolio, as well as his other role as manager of government business in the Senate. He returns to the comms arena with several major policy developments looming in this parliamentary term, including reviews of the Australian Communications and Media Authority, the spectrum management framework, and the Universal Service Obligation as well as ongoing supervision of the NBN rollout. Nash will keep hold of regional comms, where her most immediately apparent major policy issue will be managing the mobile black spots program, and will continue as minister for regional development. She will also add local government and territories to her portfolio.

Tehan, meanwhile, takes on the cybersecurity role – first announced earlier this year
as part of a broader national cybersecurity strategy – in addition to the veterans’ affairs and defence personnel portfolios.

**INDUSTRY RESPONSES:** Optus corporate and regulatory affairs VP David Epstein welcomed the news. “We congratulate ministers Fifield and Nash on their reappointment, and welcome the fact that minister Tehan will also be assisting the PM on cybersecurity... [he] is well known to us from our previous roles heading parliamentary committees enquiring on cybersecurity matters,” he told CommsDay. “These reappointments send an important signal about continuity, and should provide the basis to hit the ground running.”

In the coming parliamentary term, Optus is looking to government to refresh its red tape reduction efforts and closely re-examine the USO following the Productivity Commission’s review of the mechanism; Epstein said the firm was looking forward to working with all ministers on these issues.

Vodafone also welcomed the return of Fifield and Nash to their respective portfolios. “Both ministers have shown keen interest in the communications portfolio, particularly in the area of improving mobile services and competition for Australians living in regional and rural areas,” said chief strategy officer Dan Lloyd. “We acknowledge the good progress made last parliamentary term toward increased coverage and competition, including the commencement of both the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the USO and the mobile black spot program.”

“We look forward to continuing our positive relationship with government, and stress the importance of furthering the work which is underway to improve the telecommunications policy framework to deliver better outcomes for all Australian consumers.”

Industry bodies also greeted the new ministry warmly, with Communications Alliance CEO John Stanton pleased to see continuity in the comms portfolio with Fifield
Fifield has done an admirable job of getting across the complexities of the portfolio and has been willing to assess industry views on their merits,” he said. “There is much to do in the current parliamentary term. We need to design and build a new regulatory framework, as recommended as part of the ongoing review of the ACMA. This is urgent – there are many legacy pieces of regulation that simply won’t work in an environment dominated by next generation networks. This links also to the review of consumer safeguards that the Department of Communications and the Arts is about to commence.”

“The review of spectrum policy needs to be completed along with other planned deregulatory tasks, including the transfer to industry of numbering management.”

Stanton also called on Fifield and colleagues including newly minted industry, innovation and science minister Greg Hunt to work towards a stronger government-industry collaboration to seize Internet of Things opportunities. “Australia is lagging behind leading nations in working to capitalise on this – the next great disruptor,” he said.

Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association CEO Chris Althaus was similarly positive. “We welcome the continuation of Mitch Fifield’s tenure as minister for communications and the arts, and [that of] the regional communications minister role for senator Fiona Nash,” he told CommsDay. “It’s also notable that Dan Tehan’s work has been rewarded with his role as assisting minister for cybersecurity [after] his chairmanship of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security; he’s been a safe pair of hands on that committee, and so this responsibility in cybersecurity will do that areas of policy deliberation some good.”

“I’m also pleased with the retention of the regional communications portfolio and, certainly from a mobile point of view, given the very high level of focus in coverage on regional and rural Australia during the election campaign, look forward to working with Fiona Nash in that context.”

Telstra also welcomed the appointments and said it was looking forward to working with the new and returning ministers.

Petroc Wilton

Sol Trujillo re-emerges on Unlockd board

Controversial former Telstra CEO Sol Trujillo has joined the board of Australian technology startup Unlockd. He is one of a number of high-profile appointees, with former Virgin Group CEO David Baxby joining him on the board, while executives from Atlassian and Goldman Sachs will also join the business.

Unlockd is fresh off its initial launch in the UK with Tesco Mobile last month, while in January it launched in the US with Sprint subsidiary Boost Mobile. The company is boosting its board ahead of a planned international expansion and further funding.

The company enables telcos to push advertising to mobile subscribers in exchange for bill discounts but has so far attracted more business deals outside of Australia.

Trujillo was CEO of Telstra from 2005-2009 – a time marked by a more combative
approach with regulators and the federal government but which also significant investments in its mobile strategy. He currently sits on corporate boards in the US, EU and China and has managed operations in more than 25 countries around the world.

Baxby, a former co-CEO of the Virgin Group, also brings significant international experience. He spent more than a decade leading the Virgin Group in various capacities in Australia, China, Singapore and Geneva following an initial 10-year career as a Partner at Goldman Sachs Australia. He is also currently a non-executive director of Virgin Australia.

“Unlockd represents the best of Australian technology entrepreneurs taking on the world and I am looking forward to helping the team in any way I can,” Baxby said.

Meanwhile Craig Rees, former group product manager of platforms at Atlassian, will join Unlockd as chief product officer. Prior to joining Atlassian he was head of digital technology at Vodafone Australia. And Ashley Conn, an executive director of Goldman Sachs’ mergers and acquisitions group, will join Unlockd as CFO. Prior to joining Goldman Sachs he was a VP at Morgan Stanley in New York.

Unlockd co-founder and CEO Matt Berriman said the company's strong operational, advisory and investment structure was now reaping rewards. “We have had many global, strategic approaches regarding investment, especially as we build a more significant team and group of investors. Now more than ever it is important we focus on the growth of our human capital to ensure we are better equipped to maximize future investment,” Berriman said.

A10 Networks eyes growing application delivery controller opportunity in ANZ market

US application networking firm A10 Networks is on a mission to dramatically boost its footprint in the Australia and New Zealand market, looking to increase its share of the application delivery controller market by expanding its local partner portfolio.

Speaking to CommsDay on the sidelines of Cisco’s Live event in Las Vegas, A10 Networks strategic alliances VP Gunter Reiss said Australia had already been a key market for the firm in terms of identifying new opportunities. “We have a number of customers [there], particularly in the service provider space and also some of the larger enterprises,” he said. “Our strategy is to partner with the bigger global technology partners to bring our joint solutions to the ANZ market.”

Reiss said A10 Networks had been working to expand its service portfolio from load balancing offerings to a range of security services, including distributed denial-of-service mitigation and converged firewalls, along with a raft of products and services centring on network visibility.
The firm’s main proposition is its Advanced Core Operating System, a platform designed to deliver increased application networking performance and security. Reiss said ACOS centred on a crucial part of networks “where you get a lot of visibility of the traffic, which helps us with the security aspects.” He added that A10 Networks had forged a strategic partnership with Cisco around network visibility.

While Reiss would not speculate on the firm’s expected addressable market in Australia, he said it had – until now - been the challenger in this geography. ‘We’d now like to grow our market share in the Australian market,” he said. “You will see us investing in [and focusing] on partnerships [which] are fundamental for A10 Networks.”

Reiss – who was previously IP and broadband strategy and business development VP at Ericsson – said he was very familiar with Australian telcos such as Telstra, noting also “the partnership that Telstra has with Ericsson over there.”

He said he had brought Ericsson into A10 Networks’ partner ecosystem back in 2012. “Riding on Ericsson’s coat tails, we are one of their biggest partners for our entire portfolio from application delivery controllers to carrier grade network address translation, and IPv4 and IPv6 conversion, which is really important for the Australian market.” CGNAT is a technology that facilitates the sharing of global public IP addresses among multiple local private IP addresses. It is aimed at ISPs and carriers, but can also replace NAT devices in enterprise networks.

Looking ahead, Reiss said that the firm would also focus strongly on pushing its suite of software-defined networking and network function virtualisation offerings. “Service providers are all virtualising and that’s a big play for us,” he said. “Again, that’s where partnerships such as those with Cisco and Ericsson are really fundamental for us.”

Richard van der Dray

ACMA reaches out to industry to help tackle spectrum planning challenges

The Australian Communications and Media Authority has gone on the front foot to strengthen its collaboration with industry on spectrum planning. The idea is to draw on stakeholders’ views and their own expertise to help the regulator assign its own resources more effectively, and to help take full advantage of opportunities such as new technologies for spectrum sharing and the ongoing spectrum review.

The ACMA has just held an experimental spectrum planning work program tune-up event across Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane; it will continue the format if feedback on the first session is positive.

“We saw what we considered to be a gap in our engagement strategy with industry: a broad, work-program focused discussion on domestic planning issues,” explained spectrum planning branch executive manager Chris Hose. “This is an opportunity to share our thoughts with the broader industry on the matter of prioritisation.... when everyone’s engaged in it, hopefully we can do a better job of it.”
Prioritisation in spectrum planning work is a key challenge for the ACMA with limited resources available to split between strategic and operational imperatives, huge demand for spectrum and a web of stakeholder sensibilities to manage.

And while spectrum planning is, as Hose noted, “integral to the entire spectrum management process,” it is subject to a host of influences from fundamental physics and engineering limits, through technical standards and international harmonisation, to policy and legislation.

However, Hose also noted several key opportunities in spectrum planning that the ACMA is looking to industry to help it seize, such as spectrum sharing driven by new technology. “For a long time, the idea of dynamic spectrum access, the use of geolocation and databases and so forth, have promised a world where sharing becomes almost automatic and very simple. It’s clear this hasn’t come to fruition yet – but perhaps we’re on the cusp of where this can really provide a viable sharing tool,” he said.

“Elsewhere in the world we’ve seen TV UHF ‘white space’ database frameworks, the US has just established frameworks in the 3.5GHz range and so forth; so the question is, for all of us, what can we do on this issue domestically? The ACMA is very eager to take advantage of this, but we need industry to be involved, and to want to be a part of it as well.”

Another opportunity is to harness the spectrum expertise within the sector. “My question today for industry... is to ask what more can you do, what more do you want to do – and we’re keen to have that conversation with you,” said Hose. And finally, he added that the ongoing spectrum review “provides the mandate, the encouragement and the requirement for us to have a good look at the spectrum planning and technical frameworks that have evolved over the past 20 years or so.”

Of course, there’s the prospect that the review itself could change up some of the ACMA’s spectrum planning work. However, it will obviously under any spectrum regulation framework in some form; communications infrastructure division GM Giles Tanner told CommsDay that the regulator was very keen to continue with business-as-usual work throughout the review implementation. “We’re still working out the details of how that will work; we’re hopeful that, in the long run, what it will give us is better tools for implementation of actual decisions,” he said.

Petroc Wilton

**Aussie telcos offer customers free calls to France in wake of terrorist attack**

Optus, Telstra and Vodafone Australia have moved to offer customers free calls to France, following the terrorist attack that took place in Nice on Bastille Day.

Optus’s consumer post-paid mobile and fixed customers will receive free standard voice calls to France until midnight AEST on 21 July. “This includes calls to mobile and landline numbers,” said Optus, noting that calls made to France during this time would not be charged to customers’ next bill. The Singtel-owned firm added that pre-
paid mobile customers would get zero-rated standard voice calls made to France during
the same period.

Telstra, for its part, offered free texts as well as free standard voice calls made from
personal post-paid mobiles and fixed lines to France – also ending on 11.59 PM on 21
July. “For personal prepaid customers, we’re offering a refund of the costs of your
standard voice calls and SMS to France,” said the telco, noting that refunds would be
applied by 29 July.

Meanwhile, a Vodafone spokesperson told CommsDay that following the incident in
Nice the carrier will be offering a full credit for the cost of international direct dialling
calls from Australia to France until midnight on 19 July to “any customer who contacts
us about their circumstances.”

Richard van der Drasy

**Singapore confirms fourth mobile operator license**
The Singapore government is set to introduce a fourth mobile network operator.

As part of the rules for an upcoming spectrum auction, the Infocomm Development
Authority of Singapore set aside 60MHz of frequencies in the 900MHz and 2300MHz
spectrum bands for a new mobile network operator, officially paving the way for the
entry of a fourth player in the market.

As reported earlier, the 60MHz of spectrum for a new operator will be offered at a
discounted reserve price of S$35 million – 45% below the reserve price for the rest of
the 175MHz spectrum on offer.

At least two companies are reportedly interested in becoming Singapore’s fourth mo-
bile network operators: broadband ISP MyRepublic and OMGTel, a unit of wireless
systems supplier Consistel. While both firms have expressed interest, they are also lob-
bying the government for further incentives such as a national roaming scheme, and
have yet to submit formal applications.

The deadline for submission of expression of interests from newcomers has been set
for 1 September with the actual auction set for as early as October.

In addition to the 900MHz and 2300MHz, the auction also includes frequencies in
the 700MHz, and 2500MHz bands. All three Singapore incumbent mobile operators,
Singtel, Starhub and M1, are expected to bid for new airwaves in the auction.

Tony Chan

**US launches US$400m Advanced
Wireless Research Initiative**
The Obama administration in the US has launched a US$400 million programme
aimed at accelerating the research and development of next generation wireless technol-
ogies, namely 5G.

The Advanced Wireless Research Initiative, led by the National Science Foundation,
will enable “the deployment and use of four city-scale testing platforms” to stimulate wireless research in the US. The AWRI is positioned to complement the US Federal Communications Commission’s newly announced spectrum ruling, which allocated 11GHz of new spectrum frequencies above the 28GHz band for wireless networking.

“That vote made the United States the first country in the world to make vast quantities of high-frequency millimetre-wave spectrum available for both licensed and unlicensed use. This spectrum, in combination with other spectrum already available, promises to enable faster speeds, quicker response times (“lower latency”), and increased capacity in future wireless networks,” said the White House.

The AWRI programme includes an US$50 million investment in advanced wireless testing platforms by the NSF as part of an overall US$85 million public-private effort with more than 20 technology companies and associations, which include all the major US mobile operators, key technology vendors such as Nokia, Samsung, Qualcomm, Juniper Networks and Intel and industry associations CTIA, TIA and ATIS.

“Each platform will deploy a network of software-defined radio antennas city-wide, essentially mimicking the existing cellular network, allowing academic researchers, entrepreneurs, and wireless companies to test, prove, and refine their technologies and software algorithms in a real-world setting,” the White House said. “These platforms will allow researchers to conduct at-scale experiments of laboratory-or-campus-based proofs-of-concept, and will also allow four American cities, chosen based on open competition, to establish themselves as global destinations for wireless research and development.”

Another US$350 million investment is planned by the NSF over the next 7 years in academic research to leverage the testing platforms. “This will allow a broad base of NSF-funded experiments on potential breakthrough technologies to be taken from proof-of-concept to real-world testing at scale, here in the United States,” said the program announcement.

Key areas highlighted for potential research by the programme included ultra-broadband networks that is 100 times faster than 4G, real-time video and sensor data for first responders and emergency room doctors, semi- or fully-autonomous vehicles, industry IoT, and virtual reality.

Operators tap into Pokemon Go success

Operators in the US have jumped onto the Pokemon Go bandwagon with special offers and promised incentives, although Australian operators seem to be still waiting on the sidelines.

While the augmented reality game doesn’t appear to use much data on the network, T-Mobile US and Sprint have figured out at least two ways to leverage the marketing hype to their advantage.

T-Mobile US is offering a special promotion under its “T-Mobile Tuesday” incentive scheme that gives its users free, unlimited data for Pokemon Go traffic. Recognising
that users may run out of power due to the need to constantly have their phone on during gameplay, T-Mobile US is also offering specials on battery packs, and additional prizes such as rewards in PokeCoins for in-game purchases, and trips in the US to hunt Pokemon.

Another operator looking to capitalise on the game is Sprint, which promises to drop Pokemon “lures” inside its retail stores to attract Pokemon - and hence players - into those locations, along with free charging for player’s devices. Sprint said it will also have Pokemon Go “experts” on hand to coach players and share information such as locations for suppliers and Pokemon training.

At this point, Australian mobile operators seem to be taking a ‘wait and see’ attitude. While Australia’s major mobile network operators acknowledged the popularity of the game for their subscribers, they have yet to roll out game-specific promotions.

Telstra said its customers “love” Pokemon Go, and have been snapping up battery packs, but has yet to announce any special offers for players - with the exception of advice that they can enjoy Pokemon Go usage for free over its Telstra Air Wi-Fi hotspot service.

Optus and Vodafone also acknowledged the take up of the game by their users, but pointed out they did not feel the need to create special plans for Pokemon Go players since the game doesn’t use any more data the typical applications. Optus told local media it had yet to register any “spikes” in data usage on its network, while Vodafone said the game was similar to web browsing with a 2GB plan capable of offering some 200 hours of game play.

The assertions from Optus and Vodafone are confirmed by data gathered by network analysis firms. In a study of 100 Pokemon Go players across 3,000 sessions, the game consumed between 5MB to 10MB of data per hour, much less than other over-the-top apps such as Facebook and Youtube.

**CHATTINESS:** That said, the sheer number of users created by the popularity of the game does impact network operators, noted Procera Networks VP of global marketing Cam Cullen in blog post.

After studying the data from a European mobile network with about 2 million subscribers, Cullen found over 7% of the active subscribers were playing the game in the three hours he studied. And while data usage per user was low, the number of simultaneous sessions did impact the network.

“Bandwidth is just one factor on a network. One usage parameter often overlooked is the number of sessions that the application generates, which affects ‘stateful’ network elements (analytics, charging, and security among them), have to deal with ‘chatty’ or ‘noisy’ applications as they consume system resources,” he wrote. “Pokemon Go is already pretty chatty... although the bandwidth is pretty low for the application (about .1% of the overall traffic) compared to Facebook (which is about 16% of the overall traffic), the session total for Pokemon Go is almost 1% of all sessions on the network.”

Tony Chan
AT&T brings NFV to 76 countries
AT&T has launched what it calls a “network functions on demand” service across 76 countries and territories, including Australia and New Zealand.

According to the operator, the new offering – essentially a network functions virtualisation product – allows businesses to deploy a single “universal piece of equipment” to support virtualised functions anywhere on AT&T’s global footprint.

Initially, the platform will support Juniper Networks virtual routing, Cisco virtual router, Fortinet virtual security and Riverbed virtual WAN optimisation services with additional capabilities to be added in the future.

“Building networks by deploying network functions in software is a major shift in network design,” said AT&T CEO for business solutions and international Ralph de la Vega. “We’ve broken through traditional, cost-prohibitive barriers. Our software platform delivers a simple, flexible and efficient experience for any business, virtually anywhere and anytime they need it.”

The NFV product is intended to enable businesses to roll out network elements such as routers and firewalls much faster while simplifying network operations and reducing costs. It is now available across dozens of countries across the Americas, including the US, Argentina, Brazil and Canada; APAC, including ANZ, Japan, Hong Kong, India and Indonesia; and EMEA, including the UK, France, Germany and Denmark.

Tony Chan

DIMENSION DATA’S STEFAN KNIGHT JOINS MURU-D
Former Dimension Data connectivity practice manager and tech entrepreneur Stefan Knight has joined Muru-D, the start-up accelerator backed by Telstra. A Telstra spokesperson told CommsDay that Knight’s new position as Muru-D networks and community manager will see him grow its pool of mentors and investors “who can help our start-ups go global.” Previous roles included stints as mentor with a range of firms such as advertising platform provider Gauge Mobile; ComerSign, a Canada-based website that aggregates restaurant and bar tweets; and online publishing marketplace MediaCooler.

ON THIS DAY 10 YEARS AGO: FROM THE COMMSDAY 2006 ARCHIVES
The Council of South East Queensland Mayors, representing 18 local governments, applied for up to A$300 million in funding to develop an ultra high-speed broadband network covering nearly three million people… Telstra was pushing for the further deployment of ADSL networks in rural and regional areas with the assistance of Broadband Connect funding, claiming that it was a far superior tech choice than fibre or WiMAX rollouts… Communications minister Helen Coonan chaired the inaugural meeting of the Industry Reference Group, which had been assigned to work on a blueprint for Australia for the rollout of next generation broadband by governments and the private sector.

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