



Government of Papua New Guinea

National Information & Communications
Technology Authority

MEDIA RELEASE

51st Independence Message

Connecting Papua New Guinea: Building the Digital Highways of a Nation



Monday, 14th September 2026, Port Moresby

As Papua New Guinea celebrates 51 years of Independence, NICTA is helping build a connected nation not only through telecommunications networks, but through stronger institutions, greater access and a digitally enabled economy.

By Lume Polumé, Chief Executive Officer, National Information and Communications Technology Authority (NICTA).

As Papua New Guinea celebrates 51 years of Independence, we have an opportunity to reflect on what it means to connect a nation.

For more than five decades, our development story has included the building of roads, bridges, ports, airports and other infrastructure to bring our people and communities closer together.

Today, we are working with our industry partners, development partners to help building another network of national infrastructure the **digital highways** that connect Papua New Guineans to information, services, markets and opportunity.

This has been a central focus of my first nine months as Chief Executive Officer of the National Information and Communications Technology Authority.

The journey has been demanding and fast-moving. It has also been a period of significant reform, delivery and renewed momentum at NICTA.

But importantly, this journey has not been mine alone. It has been a collective effort involving the NICTA Board, management, staff, Government, industry and our development partners.

CONNECT PNG: BUILDING THE DIGITAL HIGHWAYS

The recent cross-country journey undertaken by the Prime Minister and his delegation from Port Moresby through the Highlands and back provided a powerful demonstration of the physical transformation taking place under the Government's **Connect PNG** agenda.

A road is more than concrete, bitumen and bridges.

A road allows people to move. It takes farmers to markets, children to schools, patients to health services and businesses to customers. It creates economic corridors and opens previously isolated communities to opportunity.

But in the 21st century, physical connectivity must increasingly be complemented by digital connectivity.

A farmer needs market information.

A business needs digital payments.

A student needs online learning.

A health worker needs access to information and expertise.

A government needs to deliver services digitally.

A young Papua New Guinean needs access to the global digital economy.

The road connects places. The network connects people.

This is why I see NICTA's work as an important part of the broader Connect PNG vision.

NINE MONTHS OF MOMENTUM

Over the past nine months, NICTA has focused on four broad priorities: strengthening internal governance, improving enforcement, expanding connectivity and supporting the growth of Papua New Guinea's ICT sector.

Several milestones have been achieved.

The launch of **Starlink** has provided another pathway for extending high-speed connectivity, particularly where traditional terrestrial infrastructure is difficult or costly to deploy.

The launch of **5G** has also marked an important step forward in Papua New Guinea's digital journey, creating opportunities for faster connectivity, innovation and new digital applications across sectors.

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We have also made progress on **voluntary infrastructure sharing** among mobile network operators.

Telecommunications infrastructure is expensive to build and maintain, particularly in Papua New Guinea's challenging geography. Greater infrastructure sharing can reduce duplication and allow investment to reach more communities.

There are now examples of sharing arrangements involving operators including Vodafone, Telikom and Digicel, although further work remains to achieve broader industry participation.

The national objective must be clear: **more infrastructure should ultimately mean more Papua New Guineans connected.**

A STRONGER REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Connectivity must be supported by effective regulation.

We have also increased active enforcement around the country now. Regular and routine inspections on radio dealers to ensure that shops should be selling type approved devices.

Another significant consumer-focused milestone has been **Mobile Number Portability**. The National Executive Council has now accepted NICTA's recommendation to implement the MNP. NICTA is now working with the industry to implement the MNP. The project will go over 2-5 years or earlier.

MNP strengthens consumer choice by allowing customers to retain their mobile numbers when changing service providers. It encourages competition based on service quality, value and customer experience.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FROM WITHIN

One of the important lessons of the past nine months is that NICTA cannot effectively lead Papua New Guinea's digital transformation if we do not transform ourselves.

Digital transformation must begin from within.

We have therefore embarked on a broader internal digital transformation program aimed at making NICTA more efficient, transparent, responsive and service-oriented.

This is not about simply putting paper forms online.

It is about changing how the organisation works.

Across finance, procurement, human resources and regulatory services, we are progressively moving from manual processes towards integrated digital workflows.

Our **online payment and procurement systems** are helping modernise how internal transactions are managed.

Our **HR online services** now allow staff to access services such as leave applications and payslips digitally, reducing reliance on manual processes and improving accessibility.

The transformation is also being felt on pay days. Payroll processing, which is one of the most important services an organisation provides to its employees, is now being completed within a much tighter window, with staff pay processed between approximately **9am and 12pm on pay days**.

That is more than a payroll improvement.

It reflects a broader commitment to making NICTA's internal systems faster, more reliable and more responsive to its people.

Our **online type-approval system** is another example of this transformation, allowing regulatory processes to become more accessible and efficient for industry.

Taken individually, these may appear to be modest changes.

Collectively, they represent a change in the way NICTA operates.

We are trying to build an institution that practices the digital transformation it advocates for the country.

GOVERNANCE AS THE FOUNDATION

This internal transformation has been accompanied by a stronger focus on governance.

I particularly acknowledge the **NICTA Board under the leadership of Chairman Brian Riches**.

The Board has played an important role in providing governance oversight, strategic direction and leadership at the Board level as NICTA undertakes this period of institutional strengthening.

Under Chairman Riches' leadership, there has been a clear emphasis on strengthening governance, accountability and the Board's oversight role.

The distinction between governance and management is important.

The Board provides strategic leadership, oversight and accountability.

Management translates that direction into execution.

Staff deliver the work.

When these three levels operate with clarity and shared purpose, an organisation is able to move with greater confidence and speed.

I acknowledge the Chairman and the Board for their leadership and support throughout this period.

BUILDING THE INSTITUTION

Alongside digital transformation, we have focused heavily on strengthening NICTA's organisational capability.

Key recruitment has strengthened the management structure, including important capacity in **legal services, licensing, consumer affairs and digital transformation**.

We have also undertaken a comprehensive review of our internal policy environment, resulting in **36 organisational policies being developed, reviewed or updated**.

These reforms may not attract the same public attention as the launch of 5G or Starlink.

But strong institutions are built through these less visible foundations.

Good governance, clear policies, capable people, effective systems and accountable processes are what allow an organisation to sustain its performance over time.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

Digital transformation is ultimately about people.

We have therefore increased staff development opportunities, both locally and internationally, for management and staff.

We have also started creating stronger pathways for Papua New Guineans to build careers within the ICT regulatory environment.

NICTA has commenced direct recruitment of **GICT scholars** and has reintroduced a Graduate Development Program.

This is particularly significant because it is only the second such graduate program in approximately two decades, following the first program in 2005.

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The objective is not simply to recruit graduates.

It is to build the next generation of Papua New Guinean professionals who will regulate, manage, engineer, develop and lead our digital economy.

CONNECTIVITY IS ABOUT OPPORTUNITY

It is easy to speak about towers, spectrum, fibre, satellites, mobile networks and 5G as infrastructure.

But behind every connection is a person.

A student accessing knowledge.

A farmer checking prices.

A mother speaking with her family.

A small business receiving a digital payment.

A health worker accessing information.

An entrepreneur building a business from a remote community.

This is why connectivity matters.

When we close the connectivity gap, we are not simply connecting devices. We are connecting people to opportunity.

THE NEXT CONNECT PNG FRONTIER

The physical roads being developed under Connect PNG are creating the foundation for greater movement of people, goods and economic activity.

The digital infrastructure being developed through the ICT sector can multiply those benefits.

A farmer can travel on a newly improved road to market while using a mobile phone to check prices.

A business can transport its goods physically while receiving payment digitally.

A student can travel to school while accessing learning resources online.

A rural health worker can remain in their community while connecting digitally with expertise elsewhere.

This is the convergence of physical and digital connectivity.

One moves people and goods. The other moves information, knowledge, services and money.

Together, they create the infrastructure for a more connected and productive Papua New Guinea.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

The achievements of the past nine months give us momentum, but they are not the destination.

There is still much to do.

We must continue expanding connectivity into underserved communities.

We must encourage greater infrastructure sharing.

We must improve quality of service.

We must strengthen consumer protection and regulatory enforcement.

We must encourage investment and innovation.

And we must continue transforming NICTA itself so that it can better serve the industry and the people of Papua New Guinea.

Our geography will always present challenges.

But geography should not determine who gets access to opportunity.

Technology gives us new ways to overcome distance through mobile networks, fibre, towers, spectrum and satellite connectivity.

INDEPENDENCE AND A CONNECTED FUTURE

As Papua New Guinea celebrates 51 years of Independence, we should celebrate not only the roads, bridges and other infrastructure that physically connect our country, but also the digital infrastructure that is increasingly connecting our people.

Connect PNG must also mean connecting Papua New Guinea digitally.

Because when we connect a person, we connect them to information.

When we connect a community, we connect it to opportunity.

When we connect businesses, we connect them to markets.

And when we connect the nation, we strengthen the foundations of a more inclusive, productive and competitive digital economy.

I am proud of what the NICTA team has achieved over these past nine months.

I acknowledge the leadership and oversight of **Chairman Brian Riches and the NICTA Board**, the commitment of our management and staff, and the support of Government, industry and our development partners.

None of these achievements belong to one person.

They are the result of people working together with a common purpose.

There is much more to accomplish.

But the direction is clear.

Full speed. Non-stop.

The journey continues.

And as Papua New Guinea looks towards the next 51 years, our challenge is to build the physical and digital infrastructure that will give every Papua New Guinean a greater opportunity to participate in the nation's future.

**Our roads connect our places.
Our networks connect our people.
Together, they connect Papua New Guinea to opportunity.**

Happy 51st Independence Anniversary, Papua New Guinea.

Approved for Release



Polume Lume
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