Bird attack: cockatoos feast on NBN cables

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AUSTRALIANS are hungry for fast internet and it turns out cockatoos have developed an appetite for it as well.

Cockatoos feasting on spare fibre-optic cables, which are strung across the National Broadband Network's 2000 fixed-wireless towers, have racked up an $80,000 damage bill.

Flocks are attracted to the wires as they need a sturdy surface to sharpen their beaks. Their damage can destroy entire cables, which cost about $10,000 to replace.

However, the bird attack has only caused a short-term flap, as the NBN has developed a $14 solution to prevent pesky flocks from further damage.

UV-stable canisters that encase cable ends have been installed across the $3billion fixed-wireless network for about a month.

Nbn's build project manager, MND fixed wireless (capacity and expansion program), Chedryian Bresland, said it was unfortunate cockatoos had taken a liking to their cables.

"They are constantly sharpening their beaks and as a result will attack and tear apart anything they come across," he said.

"You wouldn't think it was possible, but these birds are unstoppable when in a swarm.

"I guess that's Australia for you. If the spiders and snakes don't get you, the cockys will."

The cables being damaged are not the active lines that deliver broadband and telephony services, but spares left hanging for future upgrades.

"We've been going back to our sites and discovering all this damage on the spare cables we had been hoping to use on our towers," Mr Bresland said

"They were damaged to the point of not being repairable which has forced us to rip out the whole lot and completely rerun new fibre and power cables. That costs us about $10,000 every time we have to do that."

The worst cockatoo attacks were in the Shepparton region in Victoria, and there were also problems in central New South Wales.

Cockatoos are estimated to cost the telecommunications industry millions of dollars, in what is described as a uniquely Australian problem.