

December 4, 2008

**BROADCASTING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL
TELEVISION SWITCH-OVER) BILL 2008**
Second Reading

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.50 p.m.)—Fancy having the other mob, the mob on that side, lecturing us on telecommunications and communications! Talk about waffle and bluster. I bring the House's memory back to the pitiful record on telecommunications of those opposite. They were going to try to introduce, on the flimsiest of evidence, an out of date wireless broadband system that could never work. Under them, the concentration of media ownership in this country was probably second to none. They have an appalling record in that, and they have an appalling record of computers in schools and broadband generally. Then, of course, there is the appalling uptake—which is the reason we are talking about digital switch-over—of digital television in this country. So the member for Dunkley, whom I like a lot—he has a great deal of good swagger and bonhomie and a hell of a lot of bluster and a hell of a lot more waffle—talks about WIJI. Well, the word we are using—and you will be interested in this—is SWAGOnWI, not WIJI.

Mr Bowen—This will be good!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—That's right. 'Stop the waffle and get on with it'—that is the basis of the [Broadcasting Legislation Amendment \(Digital Television Switch-over\) Bill 2008](#). We have waited for those opposite to do something about this for ages. Nothing of substance was done. The rollout has been appalling, and you know it. The technical side of the rollout has been appalling, and unless you get on with it with a bit of whip and stick it is never going to happen. So, for all your bluster and all your amendments, nothing was going to change. This bill is crucial to ensuring that the changeover to digital television can be managed sensibly and effectively and ultimately provide a much superior television service to people across the country, both in the cities and in the rural areas.

The television industry is one that I have a long and quite sentimental attachment to, as my dad spent many years—indeed, his whole working life—as a television and radio technician. Indeed, we were blessed to have one of the first televisions in our street, and I remember that lots of neighbours used to come and sit with us as we watched the black-and-white test pattern, as some in this House might still remember.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Indeed. Of course, my dad was part and parcel of the growth of television in Tasmania. So, whereas some people like to look at the birds, the bees and the trees when they go travelling, when I went travelling as a kid I used to—and I still do—look at antennae: where the TV antennae are pointing, what type they are, what type of reception they are picking up and so forth. I do not have my dad's technical skill, but I have this interest when I go and visit people and doorknock—'What's your TV reception like?'—and I try and do a bit of tuning if it is at all possible.

I have also been part of a group which worked to improve the television reception in my home area of Forth through a self-help program which has greatly increased the standard of the television we view in my valley. Our valley village and surrounds have had to rely for many years now on a community translator, community established and owned, to receive TV. The member for Dunkley quite rightly talked about the black spots program, and I congratulate the former government on that program. I wish to see

something very similar from this government, and no doubt many of you in regional areas will join with me in wanting to see that happen—all in good time, but let us start rolling out digital television.

The community translator was a result of a battle long fought and was a motivator for me to get elected to the Central Coast Council, my local council, in 1996—which, you will be pleased to know, eventually led me to this place. So there you go. I have had a lot to thank inadequate TV reception for, and I know this bill will go a long way to preventing others from getting into this place on the same grounds. We have had three versions—I say for your interest, Member for Dunkley—of our transmitter over a decade, and the current one was a result of community funding, council auspices and the federal TV black spot funding. Unfortunately—I have to share this with you—it was a case of one step forward and two steps backwards. When I finally got TV reception for my valley after four years—there was only one person left on the committee, and that was me—and after we finally got it turned on, I sat down and was relieved to watch the programs coming through fairly clearly, and I got a phone call from a neighbouring community that blamed me for ruining their reception, because it affected their district. So you cannot win, and I have never won that community ever since. However, I blame the former federal government for that.

Tasmania, of course, is scheduled to completely switch to digital by mid-2013, and it is incumbent on the commercial channels and public broadcasters to meet this deadline. Hence, we want to get on with it. However, there are a number of community translators in my electorate, such as my own and those in places like Circular Head, Sisters Beach, Gunns Plains, Eugena and more, which are not the responsibility of the major providers across the country. They will need to be publicly supported to switch over. I have already raised this with the federal Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, several times, and I will be relying on the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, at the table, to ensure that there is adequate finance to bring this about.

It is in regional areas like mine that this bill could well have the most benefit, as it will allow the switch-over to better reflect geographic, infrastructure and consumer interests in the local market. It is not a simple matter of just throwing a switch and, presto, everyone is watching a digital signal. We know that is not the case. Achieving this aim will require careful cooperation among everyone involved, and I do not just mean the government and broadcasters. This must flow down through the regulators and providers of digital television to viewers and electrical and antenna retailers and installers. Everyone will need to play their part, and it would be naive to think that it will be achieved across the country in a short period of time.

My colleague Minister Conroy, so unfairly blackened in his reputation by the former speaker, has likened this changeover to the scale of the change to decimal currency in 1966, but this changeover will be even more difficult to manage because the system for delivery of currency was uniform across the country. You did not have to use a different type of note or coin in one area to what you had to use in another even though they might be only a few kilometres apart. You were also dealing, essentially, with one provider through the government and did not have to consider the vagaries of competition which exist in our television markets. So getting all these different factors and groups to work together for the digital television changeover will be a much more elaborate juggling act. But, contrary to the sentiments expressed by the member for Dunkley, cooperation and consultation have been a hallmark of this legislative process. I refer to the *Bills Digest* of 8 October 2008, because I do not wish to plagiarise. I will read it for the edification of the member for Dunkley. It says:

There appear to have been no recent concerns about this bill raised by relevant interest groups. This may be, as noted, because the measures continue a framework which already acknowledges that conversion to digital

will require approaches that recognise the different needs of various regions. This may also be because the government—

and I reiterate—

has sought to address any concerns through consultation with a non-statutory industry advisory group it has established to support its digital transition strategy. Amendments regarding the statutory reviews also only change timing, not their proposed purpose.

Just to reinforce this consultation and cooperation in the drawing up of this legislation, may I name some of the organisations that were consulted and had their say in this legislation. There was ABC Television, SBS Television, the Nine Network, Network Ten, the Seven Network, Free TV Australia, the Regional Broadcasters Association, the Australian Community Television Alliance, the Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association, the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association, the Consumer Electronics Suppliers Association, the Australian Retailers Association, Broadcast Australia, the Australian Communications and Media Authority—is there a tie missing tonight on one of the members?—and the National Community Titles Institute. Goodness gracious! What is happening to the dress standards of this House? There is a member opposite without a coat and tie!

Mr Lindsay—I'll put a shoelace on!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You do that. The main aim of this bill is to amend the act to allow a staggered regional digital switch-over to be finished by the end of 2013. At present, the current legislation includes a switch-over date of 31 December 2009 for metropolitan areas and two dates, 31 March and 31 December 2011, for regional areas depending on the licence involved. These switch-over dates—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Wait for it—you will get the rest of it, although I think we are going to be interrupted. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.