

December 4, 2008

**BROADCASTING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL
TELEVISION SWITCH-OVER) BILL 2008**
Consideration in Detail

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.37 p.m.)—Just so that members of the House have not been confused by that waffle, I want to point out clearly what the [Broadcasting Legislation Amendment \(Digital Television Switch-over\) Bill 2008](#) is all about. This debate is being broadcast and there are many millions of Australians who want to know what is going on here and they have not been edified by the good member for Dunkley. So let me remind you. The bill allows the minister to determine local market areas for switch-over, switch-over dates for those markets and the simulcast period for entire television licence areas. This would mean that some areas could switch off analog earlier than currently permitted—common sense. And the geographical areas smaller than television licence areas could be the basis for a switch-over timetable—common sense.

The bill allows the minister to vary the switch-over date three months either side of the initial date. No problems with that—common sense. This will effectively provide a six-month window which the government can use to finetune dates for switch-over in particular areas to respond to specific local circumstances. Switch-over can be extended beyond three months only in exceptional circumstances where the initial date would cause significant technical problems for broadcasters and where those problems could not have been reasonably foreseen up to six months before the switch-over date—common sense.

So having an understanding now of what it takes to get a service in a regional area up and running, I believe we need to allow time for the changeover but also flexibility. That is the key word: flexibility. This flexibility may also include areas that are ahead of schedule, although there are not many ahead of schedule currently and that is the problem we have. Few Australians are taking up digital television, and the reason is the mob on the other side did not do anything about it. And now they want to slow it down.

This flexibility may also include areas that are ahead of schedule, as I mentioned, and ready to switch off analog services before the planned date, saving costs on simulcasting—common sense.

Mr Schultz interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Common sense, Member for Hume—and you are out your seat. A staggered switch-over will also reduce the potential for significant strain on retailers, equipment suppliers and antenna technicians and technical and engineering resources of broadcasters across the country if analog switch-off were to be attempted at the one time. Digital television, colleagues, is a wonderful advance in technology and should be extended to every corner of the nation as soon as is technically and financially possible. Digital switch-over is important for all Australians as it not only provides access to such things as better picture and sound quality and additional channels but it will also free up spectrum which can be used for delivery of new and improved broadcasting and communications services.

Colleagues, I can imagine how my village at Forth will feel when it can finally convert to digital TV in the future. I am fortunate enough to receive pay TV at home and can vouch for the quality of the digital signal even on a four-year-old, 106-centimetre plasma TV. Colleagues, my fellow TV watchers on King Island—a beautiful part of my electorate and I hope you can visit it—will hopefully be viewing five-channel digital TV by

April of next year thanks to this government's \$300,000 commitment made before the last election to convert the island's signal from a relatively-okay-to-terrible analog signal to digital.

This process of licence gathering and technical planning has been long and thorough and I wish to thank the relevant communications authorities, particularly the ABC, SBS, the King Island Council and the technically brilliant project driver and adviser, Peter White. Without Peter's contribution this funding and project may not have occurred. Well done to everyone involved and I know the long wait will be worth the effort—much better TV reception for more people spread over a much larger area. Merry Christmas to all you TV viewers. *(Time expired)*