



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**National Broadband Network**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 26 October 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 26 October 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Sidebottom, Sid, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (4.01 pm)—I just remind the member for Cowper what this matter of public importance is really all about; it is about obstructionism, negativism and hypocrisy. If those opposite are so enamoured with the Productivity Commission, they might have had a cost-benefit analysis done of the Adelaide to Darwin railway. They did not. They might have had a Productivity Commission cost-benefit analysis done on the privatisation of Telstra when they flogged it off, but they did not. We know about the results of that too.

If the member for Wentworth was so keen on it, he might have had a cost-benefit analysis done of his \$10 billion water plan. What happened to that? Of course, if he did have such interest in a cost-benefit analysis by the Productivity Commission, he might have had one done of the OPEL regional broadband plan. The member for Wentworth should not come in here and pretend to be interested in advancing broadband and telecommunications in Australia. That is just nonsense. The member for Wentworth is about destroying the NBN because that is the mandate that was given to him by the leader of his party, who does not understand ‘techo stuff’, as he so rightly said. We know what he is all about, so do not pretend otherwise.

What are we really talking about with the NBN? I think it is really important that we remember this: it is about connecting 93 per cent of premises in Australia with optical fibre, delivering speeds of up to one gigabit per second—that is, 1,000 times faster than many people experience today—and the seven per cent of remaining premises will receive next generation wireless and satellite technology, providing speeds of 12 megabits per second or more. That is what we are talking about. Why do we need it? It was put succinctly by Rupert Murdoch, who said that the reason we need it is that internet delivery and broadband in Australia is a disgrace. I find it quite ironic that one of his stable is in the commentariat business of promoting opposition to the NBN, namely through the *Australian*. I find that pretty interesting, but no doubt he still regards it as a disgrace.

When we look comparatively internationally, why do we need it? Those opposite might not like to hear this: Australia is ranked 17th out of 31 developed countries on broadband penetration; Australia is the fifth most expensive amongst 30 developed countries

on broadband prices; Australia is 50th in terms of broadband speeds; Australia is equal last on deployment of optic fibre broadband; and Australia is 29th out of 50 countries on average connection speed at 2.6 megabits per second. No Australian city is in the top 100 cities for average internet connection speed. Australia is last in the OECD for fibre penetration for broadband. They are the facts. That is the existing situation. That is why we need the National Broadband Network.

While we are doing this, part and parcel of some of the economic benefits that we will receive through the National Broadband Network include that, on average, 25,000 jobs will be supported every year over the life of the eight-year project, peaking at 37,000 jobs. Even the Australian Local Government Association stated in its 2007-08 *State of the regions* report that \$3.2 billion and 33,000 jobs were lost to Australian businesses in 12 months due to the inadequate broadband infrastructure. That is the assessment of others of the potential of this for the future of our nation.

What have those opposite provided? We have been reminded that we are up to their 19th broadband plan, that it made up of the old technologies and it has been rejected time and again. I found it very interesting to look at some of the commentary on the opposition’s broadband plan at the last election. It was that good that they dumped their opposition spokesperson. He is floating around up the backblocks somewhere, having been rewarded for his contribution—something he never believed in because he was unable to explain it; nor was their finance spokesperson or their leader able to explain it. I think that has very serious consequences for the credibility of the policies of those opposite. They do not have a credible policy but they are prepared to knock the policy that belongs here. Some industry executives said that it ‘harked back to an earlier era’ and that it ‘lacked vision’ and was ‘muddy and unclear’. I notice that the iPrimus CEO, Ravi Bhatia, referring to the policy of those opposite, said, ‘What policy?’ That is what those opposite were left with, yet they come in here and lecture us about providing infrastructure for the nation into the future.

The NBN plan itself has public and on-the-record support from prominent ISPs in Australia including iiNet, Internode, iPrimus, Macquarie Telecom, Adam Internet and Dodo. They are just some of the ISPs—

*Mr Fletcher interjecting—*

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM—**You will get your turn later, mate. Just settle. The Australian Internet Industry Association issued a statement supporting the NBN, outlining the problems of the alternatives based on wireless networks that those opposite have thrown up and criticising the comparative speed of broadband in Australia. I quote:

It is not a ‘nice to have’; it is an essential part of the modern economy.

Indeed, it went on to say:

In the past decade Australia’s internet use has grown by a staggering 12,000%. That rate is accelerating. Yet despite this, we are now ranked 50th in the world in terms of our average broadband speeds.

On 21 September Telstra announced they were signing on to be a provider of services under the NBN, launching a trial in—guess where?—Tasmania to test the compatibility of its broadband service and digital products with the NBN.

I notice that, after the drawn result in the election, those who were charged with making a decision to support one of the major parties to form government essentially supported the Gillard Labor government based on the NBN. Tony Windsor, the member for New England, said—and I think it is very accurate:

... you do it once, you do it right and you do it with fibre.

My good friend the member for Kennedy was similarly reported as agreeing that:

The national grid and NBN and are a good thing for this country, a great thing for this country.

Others have given their support. Google and Intel have spoken out in strong support of the NBN. Indeed, Intel’s managing director, Phil Cronin, said the government and industry should stop debating the need for the NBN. He said:

It’s now time to move beyond debate ... the NBN has the potential to deliver significant long term benefits to consumers and small businesses alike.

Microsoft have also added their support to the NBN project, saying:

This infrastructure will be critical in the years ahead and essential for reducing costs in health and education service delivery. It will also contribute to overcoming the tyranny of distance that exists in rural and regional Australia.

I also note, in the little time left available to me, the point made by Alan Noble, Engineering Director of Google Australia, in relation to the NBN:

The national broadband network will be the digital equivalent of the trans-Australian railway linking small towns and large, bringing new life and new opportunities to our economy and our communities.

... so too will a super-fast broadband network bring a freight train of innovation to our shores.

I suggest to the member for Wentworth and those opposite that, rather than playing games, rather than being hypocritical, rather than being negative and rather than carrying out a mandate to destroy the NBN, they join the fibre future and support the NBN.