



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (NATIONAL
BROADBAND NETWORK MEASURES—
NETWORK INFORMATION) BILL 2009**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 September 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 10 September 2009 Page 19 Questioner Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10.59 am)—I must say that the angry ant, the member for Paterson, sounds like he thinks it is the end of the world. I will just remind the member for Paterson that I live in a rural and regional part of Australia. NBN is starting very soon in a town of less than 1,000 people in my electorate. So, for your information, it is on and about. What really strikes me about the comments of the member for Paterson, and the member for Fadden before him, is that we have gloom and doom preached to us by those on the other side after 12 years of all talk and no action. We went to the last election with the NBN plan, and that is what we are about to roll out.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—If I may suggest to the member for Paterson, if you sit here long enough and listen very carefully you will hear what this legislation is intended to do and what is going to happen in my state of Tasmania, where the rollout is commencing very soon. So listen carefully and you might learn something.

I am very pleased to speak on what is a small but crucial part of one of the most important infrastructure projects of the Rudd government and, may I suggest, for the nation's history this century. Specifically, this amending legislation, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Network Information) Bill 2009, will play its part in bringing about the National Broadband Network, the NBN. The superfast National Broadband Network is about bringing Australia firmly into the 21st century and putting us ahead of the game rather than comparatively well behind, where we languish at present. This bill is essentially technical in nature—

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—if the member for Paterson actually were to read it—but could prove crucial in ensuring that the rollout of the National Broadband Network happens in a timely and efficient manner.

As the member for Braddon, I have had the privilege to witness not one but two major milestones so far in the establishment of the NBN, or, more accurately in my case, the TASNBN. I was able to stand alongside my fellow federal members when Prime Minister Rudd came to Tasmania in April to

announce that my home state would be the vanguard for this leap into the future. Indeed, I was privileged to host our Prime Minister; the federal Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, the Hon. Stephen Conroy; and the Premier of Tasmania, the Hon. David Bartlett, in Devonport at the Aurora substation to make the announcement. Together with David Bartlett's Tasmanian government and Aurora Energy, this government will use the natural advantages of Tasmania to begin the rollout and test the technology for others.

In July, I was again alongside the Prime Minister and Premier Bartlett when they were able to announce the detail of the rollout for the superfast broadband network in Tasmania. It was exciting to hear that Smithton, in the western end of my electorate of Braddon, would be one of the three start-up locations for the network, along with Scottsdale in the north-east and Midway Point in the south. Smithton is part of the Circular Head local government area, a close, progressive and caring community that has often suffered from being at the end of the line, so to speak. Although it has benefited from the efforts to upgrade its transport and communications links over some time, projects which I am proud to say I was able to help bring about, it now has the opportunity to be a leader in many ways. I cannot think of a better place to kick off a revolution. That is what it is—a revolution in communications possibilities for small business, hospitals and health, and schools in particular. The sky is the limit and the world is our oyster, particularly in a place like Smithton, which boasts the cleanest air in Australia at Cape Grim and produces some of the nation's best oysters.

Once established in Smithton, the superfast broadband network will be expanded as it wends its way along the north-west coast and across Tasmania into townships of less than 1,000 people. Tasmania currently has the lowest proportion of households with broadband of any state or territory—39 per cent compared with the Australian average of 52 per cent—and the north-west region mirrors this comparatively disappointing trend. I want to see the new superfast network turn that around. This clearly demonstrates the government's commitment to connecting the most regional parts of Australia first, wherever technically possible. They have as much right as the rest of the world to connect and to be connected.

I have been in close contact with the federal communications minister, Stephen Conroy, on a range of communications issues since the Rudd government came into office, and he has been willing to listen to me about the benefits this could bring to the people of my region. The first stage of the rollout has already begun. Aurora has conducted an open competitive tender for fibre-optic cable, and further tenders will be conducted in coming weeks. Physical work on the Tasmanian NBN will begin shortly. We will start digging new trenches in October and connecting the first homes at the end of the year. Our objective is for new services to be switched on in July next year.

On 13 August, Minister Conroy announced the establishment of a wholly owned subsidiary of NBN Co., NBN Tasmania, to roll out and operate the National Broadband Network in Tasmania. It will be jointly owned by Aurora Energy when Aurora and the Tasmanian government telecommunications assets are vended into the company. Mr Doug Campbell has been appointed as executive chair. He has more than 40 years experience in the telecommunications sector. Importantly, he has experience in country and regional areas, which will be vital in the rollout of superfast broadband in Tasmania. Six other directors have been appointed to the NBN Tasmania board, including Alison Terry, Greg McCann, Jodie Fassina, Mark Kelleher, Daniel Norton and Sean Woellner.

The statewide rollout seeks to connect 200,000 homes, businesses, hospitals and schools in Tasmania with optic-fibre cable capable of delivering speeds of 100 megabits per second. The remaining premises will be connected with next-generation wireless and satellite technologies that will be able to deliver speeds of at least 12 megabits per second to people living in more remote parts of rural Australia and Tasmania. Places like Smithton in the regions are currently bound by a lack of competition and provision for broadband services, but the delivery of a new superfast network will make that part of history. It will not just give people access to broadband that will be up to 100 times faster than anything available today but will open up a whole new world of possibilities in the digital era. I am sure many of these new frontiers are not even developed, but the new network will give young people in Smithton in particular and other regional locations the chance to be part of this development.

Already we have in my region companies that are making their mark in the information technology sector. They are excited not only about the potential for their own businesses through this unparalleled project but also that it will allow others to do what they have done, perhaps without the same obstacles that they have been forced to overcome because of current average communication systems.

Stan Kaine is one such Tasmanian IT innovator who is excited about the National Broadband Network and what it offers. From Ulverstone, his company, Point Duty, has been creating solutions to cybercrime and working with other companies on a range of IT projects for some years, particularly in relation to security matters. Mr Kaine says:

The NBN project is certainly a fantastic opportunity, not just for regionally based IT companies such as ours, but also for all levels of the community.

He goes on to say:

Broadband connections of the type being rolled out in our area gives the whole community access to improved services in health, education, government services and with the potential to create employment in each of these areas.

In our case, we are hopeful of creating opportunities to undertake work outside of Tasmania using the NBN infrastructure. We will be collaborating with other Tasmanian IT companies to allow us to contract for work on larger projects.

He concludes:

This will not only safeguard the employment of present staff, but will allow us to expand and employ more IT graduates.

Stan Kaine is just one of the many people who can see great benefits from the National Broadband Network, but it is not just a boon for the cyber savvy; Tasmanians will also be the first beneficiaries of hundreds of local jobs that will be created during the five-year life of the project. This nation-building network will be the most significant infrastructure project in Tasmania's history—something akin to, and as important to the future of our island state as, the hydroelectricity drive in our state during the last century. It is another example of the Rudd government investing in nation-building infrastructure in order to support local jobs in communities across Tasmania.

The decision to launch the National Broadband Network in Tasmania was based on the advice of the government's independent expert panel. Given the longstanding disadvantages faced by Tasmanians in accessing high-speed broadband, the Australian government happily accepted this advice. Last year the Tasmanian government submitted a proposal under the request for proposal process to roll out a national broadband network. The Tasmanian proposal combined use of fibre to the home and workplace as trialled by Aurora over the previous few years as well as adopting high-speed wireless services. I congratulate Premier David Bartlett and his government on their foresight and I look forward to working together with them to see it proceed further in the future. They have joined the Rudd government

in a journey into the future—unlike those across the chamber, who can only seek to pick holes and criticise in a vain attempt to cover up their own inadequacies over the past decade in the broadband sphere.

For the record, the current opposition left a legacy of 18 failed broadband plans in 11½ years of government. Before the 2007 election the current opposition was prepared to deliver high-speed broadband only to those living in five capital cities, ensuring an ongoing digital divide. Furthermore, they provided no safety net for regional and rural Australia. In opposition they are policy-void—they have not announced a single broadband or telecommunications policy.

As a result of the current opposition's inaction as a government over 11½ years, the Australian broadband performance is behind that of countries we consider as our international peers. The latest OECD figures show that Australia is in the bottom half of OECD countries in terms of broadband take-up—indeed, we are placed 16th out of 30 countries. Australians pay more for broadband than most other OECD countries—in fact we are 20th out of 29. And Australia is the fourth most expensive for low-speed connections and fifth most expensive for medium-speed connections in terms of average monthly subscription prices. So all in all we have fallen further and further behind. Telstra admitted on July 16, 2008 that two-thirds of metropolitan areas and more than 50 per cent of people in regional areas cannot get speeds of 12 megabits per second.

This government understands that Australians need improved broadband services no matter where they live, study or work. Broadband is critical enabling technology that will change how businesses serve their customers; how government delivers services; how schools, universities and TAFEs deliver learning; how hospitals and health professionals deliver better health outcomes; and how citizens collaborate in the future. It will enable businesses and individuals not only to do more efficiently what they already do but also to do competently new things that nobody could anticipate today. I think that is the most exciting aspect of the National Broadband Network: its capacity to be able to do things into the future that really we cannot imagine now. I think that is very important, and we all know how quickly that future comes upon us.

Let me look at this particular piece of legislation. It is important to the NBN and its rollout that there is access to vital information about current networks, both communications and other infrastructure. The people planning and building this network must be quickly and easily able to access the detail of poles, ducts and pipes as well as cables and more. The preference is obviously to access this information in a cooperative manner. I am sure we will have little problem with this in Tasmania as Aurora is a key

partner in this project and already has an extensive network through its electricity operations and is used to dealing with other utilities and service providers.

But it is important to have a mechanism where the government can place some obligation on other communications carriers and utilities to provide this type of information in a timely manner to prevent delays and problems in the rollout. This cannot be done in a haphazard or unregulated way. This legislation includes detailed protection for the confidentiality and security of the network information that will be the subject of planning for the National Broadband Network. This is important given that such information may relate to sensitive and critical national infrastructure and also may have commercial impacts.

Let me recap on what I have been saying about this program and the benefits it will bring. This government has committed to spending up to \$43 billion on what is a massive infrastructure program with real and tangible benefits for just about every Australian. I am sure there are people out there who think that this will not have an impact upon their lives, but in months or years to come they may look back and wish they had had the benefits of this network many years earlier. This has the potential to touch the lives of everyone at work, study, rest and play in ways that we cannot even imagine now. The National Broadband Network will support and stimulate jobs in the short term and create the jobs of the future, drive productivity and underpin the strength of our Australian economy, improve our international competitiveness, assist the nation's fight against climate change, improve education and health service delivery and ensure the connectedness of our regions.

I am sure that my sons, who live away from home to study, would agree that I am not the most technically adept person around, but I am looking forward to the day when I can access a superfast network to keep in touch with them by more than just a phone call or a patchy online camera system. This may be while they study or it could even be the catalyst that can bring them closer to home because of new business and employment opportunities that the National Broadband Network could open up in my region. Indeed, I am confident that it will do this. I am sure many other parents in regional and remote locations look forward to the improved communications that this project promises. Perhaps the new network will also allow me to speak face to face online with my constituents, wherever they may be across what is a large electorate. I am excited by the potential that it offers and I urge my colleagues here in this House to do whatever they can to support it. No-one can argue against the fact that it is time to bite the bullet and move forward, and I am delighted that the National Broadband Network is

beginning in the beautiful township of Smithton in my electorate of Braddon.