



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Main Committee**

**SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (DIGITAL TELEVISION  
SWITCH-OVER) BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 25 May 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (5.35 pm)—I am very pleased to make my contribution to what is a really important piece of legislation that will affect many thousands of households throughout Australia. The Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009 is aimed at making that switch-over a little easier for people who are in need, and I know there are a lot of people in need who will benefit very much from the switch-over. As is the case in your electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker, people in my electorate have TV reception problems. These problems are not just with digital—that is the future for a lot of people—but even with analog. I know that you and I have discussed this over many years in our friendship and in our relationship over the course of a number of committees. I remember it being an issue in our first committee following election to parliament in 1998. The whole area of being able to receive television reception in hard-to-receive areas was very much an issue then and it will still be an issue with the digital switch-over.

I hope that the template your government brought to bear in terms of black spots will be one that we will be able to adopt. Good policy, no matter who introduces it, should be followed. I congratulate the former government on that. My electorate, in particular, was a beneficiary of a number of black spot programs for isolated areas and for those areas with hard-to-get TV reception. So there is a good template, and I have spoken to the current Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, who is cognisant of these issues and wants to assist. I think good work has been done in the past but we need to continue that into the future.

This legislation is about amending the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999. It is designed to allow information to be passed on to relevant authorities so that they can go about assisting people in the switch-over arrangements. That is the nub of this. I understand that the act, as it currently exists, is applicable to certain areas of government assistance but is not at the moment relevant to social security in giving permission to the relevant communications authority. It is, I believe, relevant to date with regard to information that has been relevant to people affected by this information.

Who are we trying to help? We are trying to help people in need and, as many of my colleagues have pointed out, pensioners are in need. I was very pleased to note, along with my colleagues of course and no doubt those opposite, that pensioners, particularly single pensioners, were able to get a much-needed rise in the pension, as were pensioner couples. On top of that are the other allowances that are going to flow from it, so I was really pleased about those changes. This legislation is designed to help those on an age pension, those on disability support pensions, those on carer payments and those on the Department of Veterans' Affairs service pension or the income support supplement. They are people who will benefit from assistance in the switch-over, and the switch-over is meant to be complete by the end of 2013.

I was very pleased to contribute to the debate on our earlier legislation, the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2008, amongst, I must say, a lot of late night mayhem particularly caused by some of those opposite. Their shadow spokesperson, Mr Billson, has been an advocate of good TV services in Australia—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)**—The member for Dunkley.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker; I thought I said that. People were raising some issues in relation to that legislation, particularly in respect of black spots. I was happy to talk about that as well. Anyway, it is now mandated that the digital rollout should occur before the end of 2013. That will be particularly the case for Tasmania. I look forward to that because, the way things have been rolled out until now, quite frankly we could be waiting forever. I have people on the west side of Burnie who unfortunately have been waiting and waiting and waiting for digital signals. It is so slow that I assume we will end up with the next technology rather than wait for the old system. Of course, these people are eagerly awaiting digital television.

Digital television is quite a remarkable technology. We have a choice—we have standard definition or high-definition, widescreen pictures, high-quality audio and surround sound, multichannel programming, electronic

program guides and closed captioning of programs, which is of particular benefit for the hearing impaired. These are terrific options resulting from digital television. How do you get this digital television? For the uninitiated and for the record, you can add a standard definition set-top box, as many have done. Some are even adding a high-definition set-top box. Or you can connect a personal videorecorder, or PVR. Finally, purchasing an integrated digital TV seems to be the go at the moment.

My only experience with digital television, apart from in Parliament House, has been through pay TV. I must say the difference in quality between that and analog is remarkable. It really is a different viewing experience with both the audio and visual service. It is something that people believe is part and parcel of the 21st century and it should be available.

This government, in its wisdom, is now carrying out a trial of digital television and is doing a switch-off, if you like, from analog to digital between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011, in certain areas. In the first half of 2010, the switch-over will take place in the Mildura-Sunraysia TV licence area. From what I understand, the Mildura region itself already has 70 per cent digital TV take-up. That is fantastic. Out of interest, I believe 42 per cent of households in Australia already have at least one digital-ready TV, according to ACMA. So digital is on the move. In the second half of 2010, the regional South Australian TV licence areas will come online; in the first half of 2011, regional Victorian TV licence areas will come online; and, in the second half of 2011, it will be the turn of regional Queensland TV licence areas. I could have said I lobbied very hard for my region to be first, but we were receiving too many other things, so all these benefits are initially being distributed across other areas. The important thing here is that these are trial regions. One good thing about trialling this in Victoria is that we will benefit from the lessons learned in that digital switch-over. All this will help regions like mine when we finally switch over.

I mentioned before why we need to change the legislation. I have now found the reference. From what I understand, the current confidentiality provisions contained in section 202 of the Social Security (Administration) Act provide that protected information can only be obtained, recorded, used or disclosed for the purposes of social security law, the Farm Household Support Act 1992, the Dental Benefits Act 2008 or the Family Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention Pilot. So, quite rightly, before information and records are used to provide information for people to benefit from what will be an entitlement, this change in legislation is necessary. Anyway, that is what this legislation is intended to do.

How will we help people that are eligible, those whom I mentioned before? It will all involve help through the provision and/or the installation of any or all of the following. For the record these are set-top box, cables and antennas, to name the three major areas. So I am very pleased to make my contribution to this switchover legislation and I thank the government for assisting those who will need this help. I look forward to the trials being rolled out throughout the rest of Australia. I remind everyone that, according to ACMA, apparently there are 19 million television sets in Australia today—so what are we going to do with them when we are finished with them?