



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

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

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 14 September 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 14 September 2009
Page 6
Questioner
Speaker Bird, Sharon, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (12.36 pm)—I rise to support the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Network Information) Bill 2009 and listened with great interest to my two colleagues who spoke before me. I come from a regional area where one would think we would have fairly good access to broadband. But I am consistently dealing with people in suburbs in my area who, because of the geography of the area, are not able to access existing cable broadband and, because of the escarpment issues, find wireless a particularly unsatisfactory solution to that.

As our economies develop and the world develops its business models based much more on online presences, it is critically important to Australian industry, business and communities that we have the broadband infrastructure that enables us to expand into and be part of that future. As a very small example of why this is so significant, some of the tourism operators in my area tell me that, when overseas travellers look to book travel accommodation and events that they might want to participate in whilst they are in Australia, they have an increasingly high level of expectation about what information they can access online before they travel. Having travelled to a small extent myself I know I actually do the same thing, so it was interesting to hear this from the tourism operators' perspective. For example, if people are booking accommodation, they now expect to be able to go to a website to download video footage of the area and the room and to interact with the sorts of services and sites that are around the accommodation.

The level of infrastructure that is needed to support the type of information people seek from the internet, even at the simplest level of travelling and booking accommodation, is increasing year on year. When we build a national broadband network we should be looking towards the growth in that demand, not simply at the current demand. The level of expectation of the performance of broadband in all sorts of industry sectors is going to exponentially increase over time. For the success of our businesses and our industry sectors, we need to ensure that we have a modern, efficient broadband network that can provide that service. Clearly before the last election we were not well on the track to having achieved that. I am conscious of the wireless proposal of the previous government which the former speaker mentioned, but

while wireless fills a gap in some areas it is far from sufficient and appropriate for the vast majority of needs that will be developing into the future.

The bill that is before us is part of the requirements that need to be put in place for the broadband network to roll out. It basically seeks to amend part 27A of the Telecommunications Act 1997. For the record, it seeks to do that in three ways to impose a requirement to provide information, if requested, on utilities as well as telecommunications carriers. It sets out the purposes for which information is permitted to be disclosed and used so that two specific achievements can be met. Information may be disclosed to and used by Commonwealth officials and advisers for the purposes of the implementation study for the National Broadband Network or for a purpose specified in the regulations that is related to a broadband telecommunications network. Secondly, if appropriate, information can be disclosed to and used by the NBN Co. and any other company that is designated by the minister for a purpose related to a broadband telecommunications network. Thirdly, the amendments impose sunset periods on certain provisions in part 27A, as amended, so that information can only be obtained, disclosed and used during the period of the rollout of the National Broadband Network.

The bill before us sits within the context of the announcement the Rudd government made on 7 April, which was a historic announcement. I appreciate the cynicism and concern of the previous member speaking, but if we all took such a narrow outlook on any sort of significant infrastructure then many of the great achievements of transport, water and electricity infrastructure that we all take for granted today would never have got off the ground. Sometimes you just have to take the leap into the future and make sure that the country is well established and able to take part in the global economy. The National Broadband Network is most definitely that sort of initiative. The National Broadband Network will fundamentally change Australia's communications landscape and vastly improve access to broadband services.

In my own area, the Illawarra, I have had a lot of conversations and I know the region is extremely excited by the potential of the National Broadband Network. The city of Wollongong is called the city of

innovation, and local people take that very seriously. There is an organisation known as ICT Illawarra, which is an information and communication technology industry cluster made up mainly of small businesses. It comes together as an industry cluster to collaborate and share experience. Its purpose is to support the Illawarra information and communication technology industry by building on local strengths. An important part of that is encouraging the economic growth of the region and the continued development of ICT, which it does through a number of initiatives.

Firstly, ICT Illawarra promotes the success stories of the local ICT industry, and I want to touch on a few of those. It also wants to nurture new entrants into the industry. For a region like ours, based on the old industries of coal and steel, we look forward not only to the ongoing future of those old industries but to the development of these new industries. ICT Illawarra is working on identifying emerging trends in the industry and providing resources to support those new entrants and emerging companies. It fosters social capital and joint ventures, which are very important drivers of much of this sector. The sector is so new and innovative that it often needs capital and joint ventures to be fostered for it to get off the ground. ICT Illawarra also provides a forum to engage with other stakeholders in education, government and other industry organisations and is administered by a management committee.

The sector is particularly keen to engage with our government on the rollout of the National Broadband Network. Indeed, quite a number of its members attended a very exciting sphere—and I will not go into the technical explanations—organised by Senator Kate Lundy at the University of Wollongong. The information and communication technology cluster of the Illawarra hosted, with the University of Wollongong, this particular public sphere camp at the iC Central campus. It was the first such camp outside Canberra and it was designed to give interested parties the chance to discuss topical issues relating to ICT and creative industries with an idea to producing a document to provide to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to inform public policy. Senator Kate Lundy in particular should be commended for this tremendous initiative and her capacity to use these new platforms to engage with broader community and public policy. The sphere was particularly important for our region in that it enabled a showcasing of some of the amazing expertise, dedication and enthusiasm of a range of ICT operators in our area and in particular the industry cluster. It was designed to use social media technologies to engage people across the country, essentially picking their brains and having a dialogue and a conversation in order to produce some policy suggestions for the

government. We were networked with simultaneous virtual events in Melbourne and Brisbane. There was twittering and live blogging going on during the presentations and it was a really exciting example of how important new technologies will be, not only for the public sphere—for the discussion of public policy, the strength of democracy and the participation of people in public policy—but also for the education sector, and there was quite a lot of interest from the university students.

This particular sphere highlighted a local company which is doing very well, a company called Internetrix. It was established by a young man, Geoff McQueen. I think he is still not even 30, and he quite puts me to shame with his life achievements! His company is, I believe, one of only two in Australia that is a Google Analytics authorised consultant. He also managed win the Integral Energy Illawarra Business of the Year Award in 2007-08 and has an extremely successful online company that provides management, consulting and online website advice and products to business. It is doing extraordinarily well. Geoff also sits on Regional Development Australia – Illawarra, a newly formed board, and will advise and assist the board to put together a proposal to come to myself and Jennie George and, through us, to the government about the rollout of the National Broadband Network in the Illawarra. This is significant for us as a regional economic driver, and the company are absolutely excited about that. They have a lot of telecommunications expertise from the university working with them on it. I would say to the member who was speaking formerly that I would suggest that if people in research at universities and businesses on the ground in regions are excited by this proposal, it is because there is a reason for that—they recognise its potential to drive new opportunities, new jobs growth, new economic growth in regions and foster the development of these new businesses.

Another example in our area is a company called Tibra Capital, which operates from a small office in Austinmer. To establish that office, the company had to negotiate a special high-speed broadband access agreement. It is not normally available at the level that they needed in that region but they were able to do that. If companies like this one are to spring up in regions and to do so successfully, we have to provide that infrastructure and not leave them in a situation where they have to try to negotiate a specific agreement. Otherwise they end up relocating. Tibra Capital is a global securities firm specialising in high-frequency equities trading, arbitrage, market making and algorithmic, or automated, trading. It has 120 staff in Hong Kong, Sydney, London and Amsterdam and includes 45 professional traders and in excess of 40 in-house software specialists. It trades more than a

billion dollars worth of equity volume each month, with up to 20,000 transactions a day. It is one of several specialised finance companies choosing to locate in Wollongong. Why? It is because the university is amongst the highest producers of IT graduates. I understand about 25 per cent of all the graduates in New South Wales come from the University of Wollongong. Tibra Capital is another company that is now a real driving force in our region but that requires high-speed broadband to operate the type of business it wants to.

Finally, at the other end, I want to highlight another organisation run by Andrew Connery. He is the managing director of Your Online Community Pty Ltd and in 2004 was the winner of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership Award for his development of community portals in New South Wales. At that point in time he had a local amateur sports website sponsored by the University of Wollongong that was very well regarded and contributed to his winning of that award. Andrew is an absolutely passionate advocate for online community portals and enabling the internet to provide much better information and engagement of communities of common interest not only in sport but also in business and broader conversations. He runs a great online newsletter as well. Andrew is also constantly knocking on my door, saying: 'I want to be part of the rollout of the National Broadband Network. It is critically important to regions like ours.'

Those are examples of local companies who are so keen to be part of the National Broadband Network—companies who have the experience and the capacity to identify where the future is going, who are innovative, who are enthusiastic and who are part of the new breed that will drive a lot of growth in regions like mine. They are really keen to be part of this and they see great potential in the National Broadband Network that we intend to roll out. The bill before us today is an important part of that, but the overall agenda of rolling out this fast-speed National Broadband Network is critically important to the economic growth of regions. I put on the record the evidence of those participants in my own local region as to why it is so important that we commit to this and why the bill before us today should be supported.