



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

**NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK
FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY BILL 2010**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 15 November 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Georganas, Steve, MP

Source House
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Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (7.54 pm)—I, too, rise to speak on the National Broadband Network Financial Transparency Bill 2010. The detail of this bill is what I would suggest the honourable member for Wentworth should have put in his private member's motion, to establish the joint select committee on the very same topic. It calls for the delay of the National Broadband Network to, amongst other things, develop a 10-year business plan—and to what end? The member for Wentworth's list of objectives includes the opposition's obsession: a consideration of the different options by which broadband services of particular speeds could be made available to all Australians.

The opposition is not set on any telecommunications infrastructure. Quite the opposite: the opposition's purpose is to do anything they can to kill the project. They are seeking to bury it in a study which will consume all clarity and also the intention of the private member's motion.

I recently read some newspaper articles reporting on a motion of this House that referred a substantial communications matter to a committee for investigation—somewhat similar to what the member for Wentworth is attempting to do with this bill and his private member's motion. The newspaper was an issue of the *Argus*, from Melbourne, of Saturday, 20 November 1920. To find anything comparable to what the member for Wentworth is doing, we need to look back into the depths of history, over half a century ago. The motion called on the Public Works Committee to enquire into the erection of trunk lines between Sydney and Melbourne and, through another motion, between Sydney and Brisbane. In the debate of these motions, as reported, the then Postmaster-General, the Honourable Mr Wise, is said to have been:

... surprised to learn that there was not a trunk line already in existence between Brisbane and Sydney, and that one extended only from Brisbane to Wallangarra, on the border between Queensland and New South Wales.

This was not the only communications matter to have been referred by motion to the committee for investigation. In 1931, the Joint Standing Committee on Public Works reported on the establishment of telephone communication between mainland Victoria and Tasmania. In 1929, the same committee had reported on the radical proposal of the establishment of telephone communication between Perth and the eastern states. It may come as no surprise that this report recommended the establishment of telephone communication between Perth and the eastern states even though it would cost the Australian taxpayer back then the grand sum of £69,800, and this was at the start of the Great Depression. It was estimated to give rise to only 50 calls per day. I thank the *Brisbane Courier Mail* for the report of Friday, 30 August 1929.

While these investigations were supported and the reports were favourable, I can only imagine what the results would have been if the current member for Wentworth had pursued his current tactics back in 1929 and in 1931 when those inquiries were taking place. One can only imagine where we would be if the Public Works Committee had come back, after years of delay, saying what the member has been saying today. If they had said that connecting Perth was too expensive and not justifiable, given apparent demand for the service, or if they had concluded that telephone technology was changing too fast for them to invest prematurely, right there and then, one can just imagine the member for Wentworth objecting and saying that copper wire technology was not good enough and that different regions should have different systems and use different technologies. We can just imagine the member for Wentworth saying, 'Perth can wait for the telephone. The Great Depression makes contact with WA simply a waste of money.' I can just imagine him as saying: 'Now is not the time. Demand is only 50 calls per day. The profit is not sufficient. The business case has not been made.' One can only imagine where we would be now if the member for Wentworth was able to do then what he is attempting to do now.

We all have access to the parliament's modern system of governance and accountability of government business entities. It has served several governments and multiple parliaments well for many years, just as it continues to do today. Matters concerning government business entities are questioned through debates on annual reports, auditors reports and budget estimates. In addition, the Senate holds its own studies and conducts its own analysis. They have done several on the NBN already. There is nothing new to see. The motivation for this bill

and the private member's motion can only be seen as totally obstructionist. The tactic is exploratory delay—
(*Time expired*)