



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Broadband

SPEECH

Monday, 2 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 5139
Questioner
Speaker Rowland, Michelle, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (11:27): I am happy to have the opportunity in this place to debate broadband accessibility because the last time a coalition member moved a motion on the NBN the subsequent headline in Delimiter read: 'Liberal MP misleads Parliament with NBN motion'. We are going well. Today the member for Banks has come into this place, having had a swig of the Turnbull Kool-Aid, and moved a similarly ridiculous motion. Look at the words of the motion; they are mired in politics. The motion ignores the benefits of having an equitable, accessible and ubiquitous broadband network, which is what Labor's NBN is. Those opposite do not care about affording all Australians, both in the cities and in the bush, the opportunities that come about through a high-speed broadband network.

One of the biggest betrayals we have seen in this place in recent years was the absolute capitulation by the Nationals on the issue of wholesale pricing equivalence. The Tories, those who represent regional areas as well, get up in this place and talk about abandoning the bush. They have abandoned the bush. They are not standing up for wholesale pricing equivalence, which is what has driven the digital divide in this country. I note that there are no Nationals MPs speaking on this debate. Where are they? They sold out their members; they sold out their constituencies when Telstra was sold; and they keep selling them out on the issue of wholesale pricing equivalence.

I note the member for Grey is listed to speak on this motion; I thought he would be in the chamber by now. I look forward to his contribution, because he has some beauties. He issued a media release on 14 February 2012 that said:

While the Government is talking up the new satellite service for rural and regional Australians, which will increase download speeds, there are real issues with latency—

when it comes to the satellite service. In April 2014 he issued another media release that said:

Good reliable internet is an expectation and people in the regional Australia need broadband as much as those in the city and as much as I welcome this upgrading of the interim service, I am really looking forward to the second half of next year when the dedicated NBN satellites come on stream.

On the one hand, he is criticising satellite services in the bush and, on the other one, he is welcoming them. No wonder his constituents are confused. Labor's NBN was supposed to end the disparity between metro and bush prices. The Nationals and regional Tories have completely sold out their constituents on this issue. As we move to the substance of this utterly contemptible and misleading motion, it should be pointed out that, in this brave new world of copper technology, the government's fibre-to-the-node trials have been delayed. As ZD Net's Josh Taylor wrote on 30 May:

NBN Co was due to commence live trials of fibre-to-the-node technology in Umina in New South Wales, and Epping in Victoria at the start of May, however neither trial has yet commenced.

Why the delay? According to NBN Co's chief operations officer, who is quoted in the same article:

The Epping trial in Victoria has slowed down a bit, while we work with the utility there to find a power solution. We're working through that.

This is what he said at an estimates hearing—a 'power solution'. This is one of the issues that I, and we on this side, have been warning about. It is one of the issues that for many years to come, when it comes to the FTTN, will confront this government as it continues with its hotchpotch approach of the MTM, or Malcom Turnbull's mess. As I wrote last year in *Business Spectator*:

... indeed, Mr Turnbull can have his tiny cabinets as he asserts—

for the FTTN—

so long as they don't need batteries, are not subject to flooding rain, and appropriate line lengths are available for each. And with 60,000 of them, don't forget to add the O&M—

operation and maintenance—

costs onto each of them as well.

Certainly, this is what the shadow minister has alluded to. These are all the issues that are differentiated from a true fibre-to-the-premises build. It will dog this government and the minister for years to come.

And, on the issue of delays, as the *Australian Financial Review* noted last week: 'Telstra-NBN Co deal tipped to miss deadline.' But the minister said it would be so easy, so quick. He is the magic man. He can strike a deal with Telstra quicker than anyone else. We all know now that the current estimate is that the negotiations to reacquire Telstra's copper could be delayed by up to six months.

I note that this motion also points to cost, just as the member for Gilmore's motion did last week—and we know what happened there. We saw the headline. The member for Banks, in his motion, specifically does not mention figures. I believe this probably indicates he does not stand by the previous comments from Minister Turnbull and the member for Gilmore. At a time when the member for Banks should be thinking about delivering broadband to his constituents he was out there, before the budget was even announced, apologising for the budget. People do not want your pity; they want the NBN. (*Time expired*)