



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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Questioner
Speaker Ramsey, Rowan, MP

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Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (11:42): The NBN has been a rolled-gold disaster. It promised the earth, but in fact it delivered about a truckload of gravel. We have got a long way to go at this stage. There is the hype that has gone around the NBN. Towns like Port Augusta in my electorate have been totally misled. In fact, fibre to the node was supposed to be finished about now. By the time the election came, the headline contractor in South Australia had withdrawn from the contract to deliver on the ground. Barely two streets had been covered in Port Augusta. When the contract was in such disarray, the objectives that were placed on the NBN board were totally beyond reach. We are now picking up the pieces and putting back on track, if you like, the NBN rollout. The member for Greenway says that I do not stick up for my electorate. She may not have listened to what I have had to say on this and a number of other issues. What I will not do is mislead the people in my electorate into thinking that things are on track and completed before they have any chance of being in that boat.

I am also responsible in my electorate for about 80 per cent of the state which will never be covered by fibre to the premise, fibre to the node or, indeed, fixed wireless networks. That is what I shall call for the purposes of this debate 'the satellite community'. One of the things I have always said about Senator Conroy's NBN is that he got it right when it came to the commissioning, building and launching of two custom-built satellites to service that satellite community at a cost of a billion dollars. I thought that was good policy, and I think it will serve Australia well in the future, even though there are likely to be some teething difficulties.

The problem was, of course, with the interim service. Here, Senator Conroy propagated a disaster at every level. Initially, he said that 250,000 Australians will be able to hook on to the interim satellite service. In fact, he only leased enough space for 48,000. Then, even worse, the NBN of the time did not limit the size of the data packages. In fact, it did not even reach 48,000 before the system slowed to a crawl.

The member for Chifley accuses us of spreading mistruths about their particular NBN. Perhaps he might take an opportunity at another time to enlighten me about where I have been wrong about this interim satellite service. The previous minister said 250,000 people could be serviced. He booked enough space for 48,000 and it crashed at 44,000.

Since that time we have been picking up the pieces. Minister Turnbull has leased another 9,000 places at a cost of \$34 million. I might point out that Senator Conroy's original investment was \$351 million for the interim service, which ultimately crashed at 44,000. Minister Turnbull, as I have said, invested \$34 million in another 9,000 places, and a further \$18.4 million to fix the 44,000 that are already operating at sub-standard speeds—in fact, the slowest dial-up in some cases.

I had constituents, who were originally quite excited at the interim satellite, contact me in my office. We were advising others, 'Hook onto it; the government has said it will work.' But we had no idea that within 18 months or two years those same people would be ringing back and abusing my office for directing them to the interim satellite service. Not only did the previous government allow over sized data packages to be sold but they did not actually ask people whether they were able to receive a service in another manner when they allowed them to sign on to the interim service. A lot of this was the result of a minister who had a crash-through-or-crash approach. I think in the end it will be viewed that he crashed.