



Amanda Rishworth MP
Federal Member for Kingston

Speech to the House of Representatives
10 September 2009

Ms Rishworth (Kingston) (12:08 PM) —I rise today to speak in favour of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (National Broadband Network Measures—Network Information) Bill 2009, a bill supporting the government's rollout of a national broadband network for Australia. This bill is an adjustment to the Telecommunications Act and is concerned with access to network information and its protection. The information will support the national broadband implementation study that will guide the NBN rollout.

Let us just consider for one minute why we need to implement this amendment to the Telecommunications Act. It is because the government has decided to act when it comes to our nation's infrastructure. The opposition, when in government, neglected the country's critical economic infrastructure. It has been left to the Rudd government to fix. This bill and the National Broadband Network is the government's plan to fix the former coalition government's shocking track record when it comes to broadband. In fact, when it comes to broadband the Howard government's legacy is shameful. They had 18 failed broadband schemes over their time in government.

Mr Perrett —How many?

Ms Rishworth —I hear the member for Moreton asking how many. They had 18 failed broadband schemes. These programs were created at the last minute, in desperation and on the eve of an election, by an out-of-touch government. We have heard in this debate some members from the opposition talking about the virtues of the Elders OPEL agreement, which the previous government hastily signed in an election campaign. This 'had great promise', the coalition government told us. It would give 98 per cent of Australia wireless broadband. However, after the election, the company quickly revised down its figure saying that it could only cover around 72 per cent of the country. There has been a lot of talk in this House about value for money. I would say that a revision from 98 per cent coverage of Australia to 72 per cent coverage of Australia does not equal value for money.

The National Broadband Network as it rolls out across the country will create jobs, build vital infrastructure and support small business. In my electorate, residents are well aware of the former government's lack of investment in critical infrastructure, from roads to ports to urban rail. But, in particular, they are acutely aware of the failure of the previous government when it comes to broadband. The reason for this is that they are experiencing it first hand. Residents in Hallett Cove, only 23 kilometres from the CBD of Adelaide, and Sheidow Park, Aldinga, Reynella and Woodcroft—just to name a few suburbs—cannot even access ADSL2. They have been frustrated by the lack of action of the previous government, who refused to address their serious concerns. Residents in my local area understand the potential that fast broadband can have to assist with health care, support education and create new opportunities in business, especially small business.

While the Liberal Party pretends to be the party for small business, they have failed in their 12 years of office to address the No. 1 impediment to small business in my electorate, and that is the lack of access to fast broadband. It is not just saying me saying this. The Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board and the councils in the area have all identified lack of access to broadband as the No. 1 constraint for small business in the area.

Let us just consider the implications for small business. A national broadband network will allow small business, regardless of where they are in Australia, to be connected to a fast, high-quality broadband service. Small businesses will be able to easily file their online tax, place orders for stock and perform many administrative tasks quickly and efficiently in ways that currently do not exist for Australian small business. The increase in productivity for a small business will be met only by the increase in the reliability of having the communication tools to perform their business activities. The National Broadband Network will bring Australian small businesses into the 21st century, allowing them to operate in the way they actually want to.

The need for a national broadband network is not just an imagined need of this government; it is a vital piece of infrastructure for this country, which my constituents know we desperately need. Just as at other times governments in our history have had to make bold decisions to build our great highways, our great railways and our great dams, so too must this government build the information highway. A national broadband network will change Australia like never before, giving improvements in business, in medical endeavours and in uniting Australians from the bush to the city.

I want to talk about some of my local constituents that have had real concerns with the lack of broadband—residents such as Shawn, who works from home looking after oil, gas and thermal drilling rigs. He is not able to receive broadband at his home in Aldinga Beach. Troy from

Sheidow Park cannot get broadband because he was told he was not quick enough to get access. He was told that the street already had too many high-speed internet users and therefore he would not get broadband. As a result, he has to rely on dial-up, which makes it impossible to operate his business activity from home.

Heather and Shane, from Hallett Cove, use the internet for home use and have recently set up a business to sell video-digital phones. These phones, which have just been released, cannot operate on the current internet services that are available to them. They are very frustrated, as they need fast broadband to promote their new business product. So if Troy, Heather, Shane and Shawn all understand the vital importance of broadband, why not the opposition?

My electorate is ready for a National Broadband Network. It is a network that should have been built many years ago. However, as I have mentioned before, it falls to the Rudd Labor government to correct the shortfalls of the previous government. We do not shy away from this responsibility. We are here to engage in nation-building, and broadband is no different. My constituents have welcomed this. Gary and Thea wrote to me earlier this year. Speaking about the National Broadband Network, they remarked:

We are very glad to hear that this is actually going to happen.

This reflects the sentiments of the many constituents in my electorate who have contacted me and are eager to know when this will happen. The government has moved forward in building this network by announcing six initial priority locations where it looks to build an optic backbone, a link that connects the towns to the cities. I noted with interest the member for Mayo's contribution to this debate. He talked a lot about areas in his electorate that are not getting broadband at the moment, but he did not mention Victor Harbor. I was quite surprised at that because the government has announced Victor Harbor as one of the initial priority areas that are being looked at. The member for Mayo was scathing in his remarks about the National Broadband Network. Does he agree with Victor Harbor being an initial priority area to be connected to the National Broadband Network? He needs to be upfront with his constituents and answer that question.

This government is not sitting back and waiting for someone else to do this. It is getting on with the job of building this network. The government's broadband network will be built in partnership with the private sector. At the peak of the project it will support 37,000 jobs and, on average, it will support 25,000 jobs per year over eight years. Building this network, which will be one of the greatest national infrastructure investments in Australia's history, will make a significant contribution to Australia's economy in the short and medium terms.

Since elected to the parliament, I have spoken a lot about health care. The National Broadband Network will have a significant impact on our health system, allowing 21st century medical care to be delivered to all Australians. I have seen the potential of this at Flinders University, my local university, which teaches doctors in Alice Springs via broadband. Those doctors do not have to come down from Alice Springs to learn. In real time they are virtually sitting in the lecture theatre as they get trained in their local area. The National Broadband Network has great potential for training in medical services—things like e-records, which are currently being talked about under the national healthcare reforms.

In education, the National Broadband Network will give new potential to our classrooms. Every school will be linked to the National Broadband Network, creating the opportunity for a new understanding of learning. Students will be able to share and learn collaboratively across the nation. I think we will start to see real opportunities in education and connection.

While we are rolling out our long-term solution for our National Broadband Network, the government—and this is a very important point—has not forgotten that there are many people who need broadband right now. So I was very pleased to be part of a joint announcement by the federal government and the South Australian government of funding which will enable Adelaide to receive state-of-the-art wireless broadband to help address more than 350 black spots right cross Adelaide. This is a collaborative approach, with the state government investing \$3 million and the federal government also contributing through the national Broadband Guarantee program. I have welcomed the announcement that southern Adelaide, in my electorate, will be one of the first areas to benefit from the progressive rollout. This is an interim solution that can work alongside the National Broadband Network, and certainly both have a critical role in connecting my electorate to the rest of Australia.

I will now turn my attention to the specifics of the legislation. This bill amends part 27 of the Telecommunications Act and allows for ready access to information about existing infrastructure that might be utilised for the rollout of the network and, importantly, for the implementation study for the National Broadband Network. Given the size and scope of the new National Broadband Network, the Commonwealth will require information on existing infrastructure that might be utilised for its construction—information concerning things like fibre transmission links, points of interconnection, ducts, pits, poles and utilities such as electricity, water and transport services. This information is a necessity so that the options for the rollout can be assessed and the network can be rolled out in the most cost-effective way possible. This is particularly important for the implementation study for the network.

These amendments allow the Commonwealth, in the event that it cannot access this information through a cooperative or commercial approach, to seek this information. This is extremely important to ensure

that this very important project, which people have been waiting for for some time, is not delayed. Of course, the government does understand the commercial-in-confidence issues. It has included detailed arrangements to protect the confidentiality and security of the information concerned and will impose a sunset period on certain provisions, which means the information can only be obtained and disclosed during the period of the rollout.

As I mentioned at the outset, this piece of legislation will assist the rollout of the National Broadband Network across the country. It is essential, because the rollout of the National Broadband Network is without precedent. It is the transformation of this country into the 21st century that will revolutionise the way we do business, the way we interact with each other and the way we live. Just as when the telephone entered widespread usage, and modern air travel was introduced, our society transformed, so too will it change again with the introduction of the National Broadband Network.

In thinking about the NBN, the greatest significance of this project, for me, is that its fullest capabilities and possibilities are still unknown. As this project is rolled out across the country it will spark innovation and create opportunities that are not yet imagined. We are bringing this country into a whole new environment of opportunities. Standing at the edge of this future landscape, I am proud to support this project and support this bill.