



**Chamber of the House of Representatives**  
**Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Fibre  
Deployment) Bill**

4 July 2011

**Sharon Grierson MP**

**Ms Grierson** (Newcastle) — (19:17): I am pleased to stand here this evening to speak in favour of the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Fibre Deployment) Bill and in support of the continued rollout of the National Broadband Network. Having heard the member for Mayo, I must say that the repetition of incorrect statements on the government's record over and over again cannot go unchallenged. We have a debt level that is the envy of most nations in the world. It defies logic, intelligence and economic scrutiny that the other side continues to make those misstatements and mislead the public. In saying that, I have to say that the National Broadband Network is a major economic and social reform that will benefit the entire nation.

It is always worth restating our reform record, and it is worth restating it here. The Federal Labor Government has introduced a number of major reforms of which we on this side of the House feel rightly proud.

Our first act in government was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. In 2008, we apologised to the stolen generation. During 2008 and 2009, our responsible financial management avoided the worst of the global financial crisis and kept thousands of Australians in employment. That was verified again in the last couple of weeks by international bodies pointing out the success of Australia's approach to handling the global financial crisis. On 1 January this year, we introduced paid parental leave for the first time in this nation's history. Just two months ago, we introduced a historic \$2.2 billion mental health package, an area sorely in need of attention. Within a matter of weeks, we will release full details of our plan to put a price on carbon.

But one of the reforms of which we are most proud, and should be most proud, is the rollout of the National Broadband Network.

As I have said in this place before, this initiative will define this government and its vision for our nation. This initiative will change the way we work, connect and deliver important services, the way we develop and best utilise skilled workforces, the way we overcome skilled workforce shortages and the way we deliver important services such as education and health.

We want a nation that will embrace technology to maximise our economic competitiveness, create the jobs of the future and improve the quality of life of all Australians. We want to overcome the historical disadvantage of the tyranny of distance, both between us and our major trading partners and between our urban and regional, remote and rural centres.

The National Broadband Network will deliver affordable high-speed access to all Australians, irrespective of where they work or where they live. It will extend optical fibre to 93 per cent of premises, with speeds of 100 megabits per second—100 times faster than many Australians have access to today. This Bill is a critical element in delivering the government's commitment to extend the NBN to all Australian households and, in this case, into new developments. This Bill amends the Telecommunications Act 1997 to ensure that fibre-to-the-premises infrastructure will be installed in new development areas.

When fixed-line facilities are being installed in a new development, part 20A of the Bill will require that facilities be designed, manufactured and installed to allow for the ready deployment of optical fibre cabling. I see new developments going into my own area, and part of their promotion is that they are fibre ready. It is a wonderful asset to communities and it is a wonderful asset to selling new developments. This Bill will literally pave the way for the physical infrastructure to be in place for the rollout of optical fibre. In turn, this Bill reflects the government's policy to be the fibre provider of last resort. So, while developers will be free to use other telecommunications providers, NBN Co. will provide fibre where developers do not wish to use another provider or where no other provider is prepared to deliver the service.

The passing of this Bill by parliament is just one of a number of significant steps towards making the National Broadband Network a reality for all Australians. Indeed, we have already passed a number of historic milestones. Last year, the National Broadband Network was switched on in Tasmania for the very first time. In May this year, the Prime Minister launched the National Broadband Network on the Australian mainland. Since then, the NBN Co. has announced its first and second release sites, which include locations in every single state and territory across Australia. Just last month, on 23 June, Prime Minister Gillard and Senator Conroy announced NBN Co.'s historic agreements with both Telstra and Optus. This paves the way for a very secure future for the telecommunications industry in this nation.

I have to mention my very own milestone when it comes to the NBN Co., and one that I am particularly proud of: the Smart Grid, Smart City initiative, a \$100 million initiative, that trials better ways of managing the grid, linking renewables into the grid system and managing electricity use in homes et cetera. It came to my attention that the technologies being applied were not necessarily compatible with the Smart Grid, Smart City and the NBN Co. But that does not make sense, and I am very pleased to say that there are now standardised trials being undertaken by the NBN Co. and EnergyAustralia to make sure that those technologies are compatible and that those two programs can work together. If the Smart Grid, Smart City project is successful, the trial will be run out all around the nation and, of course, go international. NBN will be part of that now.

The sum total of these new agreements with Telstra and Optus is that NBN's network of optic fibre will become the backbone of Australia's communications system. This will be a communications system of which Australians will be rightly proud—not the cut-price model proposed by the coalition that will do little to nothing for regional Australia. Instead, the NBN will provide a 21st century communications system for a 21st century Australian economy.

The case for the NBN is, to all but those in the chamber opposite, utterly compelling.

It needs to be recalled that Labor's plan for the National Broadband Network stems from a decade of failure by the former coalition government and the market to deliver high-quality internet access to all

Australians. The Federal Labor Government will not mimic the decade of neglect on telecommunications policy under which Australia suffered during the coalition years. As a Canberra Times editorial noted today, Australian internet usage is expected to increase sixfold in the coming five years. In fact, that editorial drew attention to Gungahlin, a very well-known area here, which does not have high-speed broadband. This is a whole, big new development that suffers for many reasons, but Telstra will not put in the fibre.

I have an area like that in my electorate called Thornton. It is one of the biggest and fastest growing housing areas in the electorate. Again, because of a combination of factors, fast-speed broadband cannot be delivered there unless fibre is put in. Telstra has not been willing to do that, which is exactly why we are rolling out the NBN Co. proposal.

Our current infrastructure is barely adequate for our present needs, let alone the future requirements of a 21st century economy. Relying on wireless internet might seem to make sense from the comfortable vantage point of Mr Turnbull's electorate on the harbour in eastern Sydney, or Mr Abbott's electorate in Manly, where population densities and demand make sense for private enterprise to invest in decent wireless infrastructure. But it is ludicrous to those of us in regional Australia where there has been a tremendous failure by private enterprise to provide quality internet access and where there is little incentive to provide 3G services. Indeed, many private telecommunications providers already struggle to provide decent mobile phone coverage across the Hunter region, let alone decent 3G coverage. The paucity of copper based internet services in my electorate, like much of regional Australia, is already very well known.

It amazes me that the opposition keep quoting the benefits of wireless and flexibility. We all want access to that and we are all using it, but we all know that it has to be backed up by physical infrastructure, and that is what we are providing. In those areas where we struggle in peak times to access a wireless service because too many people are doing so at the same time, we know that it will only work with the infrastructure in place. That physical infrastructure is now being delivered all around Australia.

I am certain other colleagues in the House would attest that there is overwhelming support in the electorates of Newcastle and the Hunter

for the rollout of the National Broadband Network. My office has been bombarded with messages from local residents urging its speedy introduction. To paraphrase the member for Greenway, who spoke earlier in this debate: the question from my constituents has not been should the NBN be rolled out, but when will it be rolled out to us and why can't it be rolled out faster? I often ask that question myself, because the people of Newcastle do understand the enormous social, economic and cultural benefits that the NBN will bring to a regional centre such as theirs.

I wonder whether coalition members have ever gone onto the NBN website. It has the most wonderful promotion of what the service will deliver. I recommend everybody go onto the website. If you cannot imagine it, go onto the website and see what the NBN Co. high-speed broadband will offer the individual and the nation. My electorate do know that the rollout of high-speed, world-class broadband in the Hunter will make us more competitive. It will erode the tyranny of distance with major capital cities. The towering sandstone hills of the Hawkesbury that now divide us from Sydney will be less of a barrier to developing new business and employment opportunities in Newcastle.

The NBN will replace the ageing and unreliable copper networks presently available. It is always interesting to speak to people who have worked for the old Telecom or Telstra. Frequently, they cannot even find where that copper wire is now. The maps have long gone. When these people go into the new little towns in the regions, they have to ask or look around to try to find where on earth the copper is. One aspect of the NBN about which I am most excited is its potential to deliver very real dividends for the health of regional Australians.

The Hunter New England Area Health Service, for example, which is headquartered in Newcastle, is responsible for health services in locations as far west as Tamworth and Armidale and as far north as Taree. I keep reminding members Messrs Oakeshott and Windsor just how much the people of Newcastle and the infrastructure of Newcastle have propped up their seats and made sure that as regional seats they have not missed out. That has included the delivery of e-health services from the Hunter New England Area Health Service in my electorate. The universal availability of high-speed broadband will substantially improve the capacity of places like Tamworth, Armidale and Taree to deliver services and advice in these regions. For example, the Hunter

New England Area Health Service, supported by the Digital Regions Initiative of the Federal Labor Government, is already undertaking a three-year program to deliver telehealth services to more than 200 patients in rural and regional communities and the NBN is supporting that initiative. Most importantly, this initiative connects patients directly to health professionals. The program targets chronic disease sufferers and links them in their own homes to monitoring, education and support services. This potential to connect health professionals with patients in their own homes is truly one of the most exciting features of the NBN for regional Australia.

Some members of the Liberal Party do know the benefits of the NBN system. I draw attention to a new state colleague, a Liberal Party state member in Newcastle, who during the election campaign said he supported the early rollout of the NBN, saying that the 'sooner' it was rolled out to Newcastle the 'better'. I strongly encourage the federal opposition to adopt that vision as well for their communities. In coming years the federal coalition will have a lot of explaining to do. It has been missing in action on some of the biggest reform issues in this nation. It will need to explain to the community why it has injected a historically high level of negativity into Australian public life, it will need to explain to the community why its campaign of outright lies and exaggerations about the impact of a carbon price did not come to pass and it will need to explain to the community why it opposed the National Broadband Network and the enormous benefits it will provide to all Australians. I commend this Bill to the House.