



**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS  
TELEPHONE AND INTERNET SERVICES IN NEWCASTLE  
13 June 2006**

**Sharon Grierson MP  
Member for Newcastle**

[Ms GRIERSON](#) (Newcastle) (4.24 p.m.)—I rise to draw the attention of the House to the state of telephone and internet services in the electorate of Newcastle and the wider Hunter region. Today it has been revealed that complaints from the Hunter region to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman have doubled in the past 12 months. That comes as no surprise to me. Hundreds of people have contacted my office in the past year to ask for help to access broadband. Since 2001, the residents of suburbs like Fletcher, Maryland, Birmingham Gardens and Shortland have been working together to convince the Howard government to provide them with access. We have had some victories, yet even when we convince the government of the need to upgrade Telstra's equipment, there are always strings attached.

Last year a new exchange was installed in Fletcher which did not have the capacity to meet the current demand, meaning that many residents missed out. This year, an upgrade of equipment in Shortland has allowed people in some streets to access broadband while others literally around the corner inexplicably missed out. It is a further frustration for residents when the presence of pair gain phone lines preclude broadband access and telemarketers from Telstra and other service providers ring up to offer

broadband services when broadband is actually unavailable. I received an email from a constituent just last month which said:

*We are still no closer to broadband services here in Shortland. Telstra promised us ADSL by 23 March, then it was May, now it's mid-June. Are they just saying it to keep us quiet? I can't believe we only live 15 minutes from the Newcastle CBD and can't get ADSL. I really need ADSL for my computer business and it's forcing me to relocate to another suburb.*

It is not just residents and families who rely on decent broadband services. Broadband is also vital for business growth and regional development. When Kim Beazley visited Newcastle last week and met with some of our region's leaders, telecommunications services were high on the agenda. Good quality telecommunications, just like transport and other infrastructure, are vital for regions such as ours if we are to be competitive in a global economy. It is unacceptable that the Howard government has allowed the sixth largest city in Australia and the fastest growing region in Australia to become, in the words of an independent expert, Paul Budde, a 'telecommunications backwater'. Novocastrians will be happy to hear that when Labor win office we are going to change all that.

In his budget reply in May, Kim Beazley announced that a Labor government will build a national fibre-to-the-node network, which will give regional Australia access to broadband speeds at least 25 times faster than the current benchmark speed. This will guarantee access for all Newcastle families and businesses to the full range of benefits of high-speed broadband internet—education, information, entertainment, as well as assuring economic productivity and competitiveness. Newcastle and the Hunter deserve nothing less.

Certainly we deserve more than the government's current proposal to restrict high-speed broadband access to the capital cities only. It is about time the Howard government gave regional Australia a fair go.