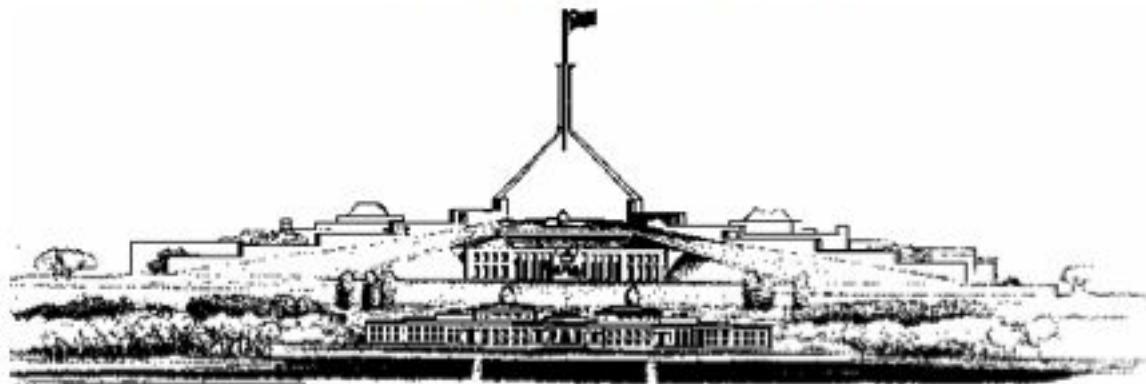




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

National Broadband Network

SPEECH

Monday, 10 September 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Cobb, John, MP	Question No.	

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (21:21): I rise today to deliver a grievance speech on an issue that is clearly causing grievances in the electorate of Calare, and that is this Labor government's wasteful, farcical National Broadband Network. The coalition has always had its doubts about Labor's ability to deliver such an important piece of infrastructure. They just don't have it in them. Look at the BER or the pink batts disasters. But we were worried when it was a \$5 billion scheme announced by the then Prime Minister five years ago. So you can imagine how we are feeling now the cost of the NBN scheme is pushing \$45 billion—on a good day.

But it is not just we on the coalition benches that are concerned. A significant number of people in my electorate are also concerned. I recently sent out a survey to my entire electorate seeking their thoughts and opinions on a number of federal matters, one them being the National Broadband Network. I have received hundreds upon hundreds—in fact thousands—of responses, which I am still working my way through.

The results vary greatly on various issues, even on the carbon tax. Although the vast majority of respondents oppose the tax, you do get some who support it and some who are unsure. But I was absolutely amazed at the almost uniform response to questions about the federal government's NBN. Virtually every single response does not support Labor's national broadband plan. Surveys are still being returned and results are still being processed, but so far more than 96 per cent of respondents do not support the scheme, and almost every respondent thinks the huge amount of money should be spent elsewhere.

Let's keep in mind these are from residents in a regional area, which the member is obviously not concerned about. These are farmers in Parkes, families in Lithgow, businesses in Orange and Bathurst. They are all people living and working in regional areas where services are not as good as in the cities, and still they oppose Labor's National Broadband Network. This is not a tax. This is the delivery of infrastructure, but still they oppose it. Perhaps they suspect it will cost taxes to do it. That is not to say they do not want a national broadband network. They just do not support Labor's multibillion dollar scheme.

Mind you, when I sent out the survey the cost of the scheme was a mere \$37 billion. Now it has skyrocketed to \$44 billion, and I think that is on a good day. You can only imagine Calare residents' opposition to Labor's scheme now.

According to the NBN Co. website's rollout map, nowhere in my electorate currently has NBN services available. Only one housing estate in Bathurst has work commenced. According to the government's corporate plan, the majority of the Calare electorate is expected to have access to national broadband services after 2013. That is if it goes to plan. It was recently pointed out that Labor's NBN plan is falling well behind schedule. The NBN's fibre network is now forecast to reach only one in four of the households originally expected to be able to connect to it by mid-2013. For the NBN to get back on track, according to the revised corporate plan, more than 6,000 customers per working day must be switching to the NBN by 2015. Let us keep in mind that, since the first users switched to the fibre network just over two years ago, the NBN has connected new customers at a rate not of 6,000 per working day but of just six per working day. It is six point nought, not six nought nought nought. Already it seems the wheels have fallen off Labor's grand plan, as they so often do for those opposite. It seems my doubts, the doubts of my colleagues and certainly the doubts of my fellow residents in Calare are indeed very well founded. As I said before, it was always doubtful that Labor could deliver on an infrastructure project of this scale.

We in the coalition believe Labor's plan is flawed in its design. We do not believe that broadband infrastructure needs to go to every doorstep to deliver superfast broadband, as Labor believes. In fact, my colleague the shadow minister for communications recently gave a great analogy to explain the ridiculousness of Labor's plan, and it is one my electorate would certainly identify with. He said Labor's NBN plan is like a farmer who lives 50 kilometres out of town wanting his dirt road sealed, but the council instead building a four-lane highway to his

farm. It is all very nice but, as the shadow minister said, it costs a fortune but does not get him into town any faster, and there are not too many people using the four-lane highway.

We do not oppose the delivery of fast broadband to Australia—in particular regional Australia, which needs the help of government to make it happen. In fact, we see it as a necessity, not a luxury, that all Australians need now; they do not need it in a decade. That is why the coalition has an alternative, fiscally responsible broadband policy that will deliver all Australians fast, affordable broadband as soon as possible. I think it would be as well for the parliament, particularly the government, to remember that, if they had not cancelled a contract that the former government made with Optus and Elders, regional Australia would have had much faster affordable broadband not in 2013 and not even in 2015 but three years ago in July 2009.