

SMALL BUSINESSES, ACCESS TO BROADBAND SERVICES

479. Mr P.W. ANDREWS to the Minister for Small Business:

Is the minister aware of problems being experienced by small businesses in obtaining broadband services in metropolitan and regional Western Australia?

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO replied:

As this is our final opportunity -

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to take a seat. I call to order for the third time the member for Vasse.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: As this is my last chance, I will take the opportunity on behalf of the whole chamber to wish the two great Western Australian football teams all the best in the upcoming finals; that is, the West Coast Eagles and that other team called "Ooby Dooby Subiaco"!

Several members interjected.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: We all know the truth.

Let us get back to this very important issue of access to broadband services in both the metropolitan and regional areas of Western Australia. I thank the member for highlighting this very important issue. As he knows, small businesses rely on access to broadband to improve their efficiencies. The Small Business Development Corporation decided to conduct a survey of the ready-response network; that is, businesses that respond to us on the take-up of broadband technology. Some 93 responses were received in the three-day survey of small businesses about their feelings on this issue. About three-quarters of the respondents have broadband connections. Almost one-third of the broadband-enabled businesses claimed to have experienced difficulties or delays in getting broadband. Some businesses indicated that it took almost 12 months to get access to broadband. More than half of the businesses not yet broadband enabled indicated that they had tried to have broadband connected but had experienced problems; 14 of that half were told that it would take more than 12 months and a further five were told that it would take six months. I want to highlight this issue because a list of the locations of those businesses makes interesting reading. Members might think that they would be in far-out places, away from the mainstream, but they are in the metropolitan area - Armadale, Marangaroo, Canning Vale, Rossmoyne, Applecross and Osborne Park. They are not exactly places away from the mainstream. Regionally they are in Broome, Bunbury, Busselton, Corrigin, Wyalkatchem, Darkan, Wagin and Denmark. It is important that we consider the comments from the opposition.

A small business in Osborne Park is very frustrated that it still cannot get a broadband connection. The business is located four kilometres from the exchange and for years has been promised an expansion of the service. A small business in Canning Vale has said that it desperately needs broadband, and Telstra has told the business several times that it will be installed. At this stage, it may be installed in December 2005, but that is subject to available ports. A business in East Bunbury has stated that it received broadband services at its previous address, but has now been informed by Telstra that it has moved into an area that is not covered by Telstra. A business in Wagin would very much like to get broadband but it is unavailable at its location. I am referring to businesses in the electorates of members opposite. A small business in Wyalkatchem is resigned to the idea that broadband will probably never be an option in towns off the main road. I have highlighted the concerns of these businesses because opposition members are not supporting the small businesses in their regions. As Minister for Small Business, I am trying to force the issue along. When will members opposite take up the cudgels on behalf of small businesses? When will members opposite approach Liberal senators to make sure that we get our fair share so that small businesses in this state can prosper? Where is the member for Vasse on this issue? He has not released a press release in support of this position. We will keep fighting while opposition members remain silent.