

REGIONAL MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT

359. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Regional Development:

Can the minister update the house on the rollout of the regional mobile communications project, in particular in the town of Koorda in my electorate?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS replied:

I am more than happy to update the member for Central Wheatbelt and the house on how we are going with the rollout of the regional mobile communications project. This is a project that the Liberal–National government is very proud of. In regional Western Australia, access to a mobile phone signal used to be sporadic at best, and most of the time non-existent. When we came into government, we recognised this and immediately put in place a \$39.2 million program to try to solve that. We are about halfway through the rollout of 113 new mobile towers across the length and breadth of regional Western Australia. It is a massive improvement in telecommunications technology and availability in regional Western Australia. We, as members of Parliament, seem to be constantly on our mobile phones and we know how important they are. Regional people are no different. For many, many years, they certainly did not have access to mobile communications as we have now. The investment provides near continuous mobile phone coverage along Brand, Eyre, Great Northern, North West Coastal and South Coast Highways, and improved coverage on Great Eastern and Great Southern Highways. Yesterday in Toodyay, I think there was another fatal crash on Toodyay Road. It is absolutely critical that we have mobile coverage on those highways to allow our emergency services and our ambulances to get to those accidents as quickly as possible. With no mobile coverage, that becomes very, very difficult. I have no doubt that this program is helping to save the lives of people in regional Western Australia.

The other important part of this project is that it allows emergency service radio coverage to the police, the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Earlier in the week we had a debate about the police portfolio and how the Liberal–National government had dealt with that portfolio. I made the point that one would not have thought that giving our regional police officers access to radios that work would have been a big innovation of the Liberal–National government, but it was. The Labor Party was happy to preside over a regional police force that did not have radios that worked. On every one of these mobile towers, there is the ability to put emergency communications for the radio network of the police and our other emergency services. Again, this makes their job safer and helps them to better respond.

The member for Central Wheatbelt has been a passionate advocate for better mobile coverage of regional communities. Tomorrow we will be in the town of Koorda. I am very happy to go to Koorda. This is a small town in the northern wheatbelt that had no coverage at all. When I was the local MP, I recall that about 10 kilometres out of town there was a truck bay. If people wanted to make a phone call, they had to drive out of town to the truck bay, and their mobile phone would work. About 10 other people would be there. They had all driven out of town to park in the truck bay and make their phone calls. The community of Koorda is very, very grateful. It also had a challenge. Late last year its internet service also had problems. Telstra moved in very quickly and put an interim solution in place. Now we have a permanent solution in place. Under this project, 51 of the 113 mobile towers are already in place. Over the next couple of years we will roll out the rest of them. Some of the projects already completed include Narembeen, Wickepin, Woodanilling, Capel, Ravensthorpe, Kambalda West, Walkaway, Port Gregory, Fitzroy Crossing, Gascoyne Junction and Nullagine. Once again, the Liberal–National government has identified a problem and put in place a program to solve that problem, and this has made the lives of regional Western Australians safer and easier, and they are more able to do business. This is a great initiative of the Liberal–National government.

The SPEAKER: That concludes question time. It is now private members' statements. I give the call to the member for Albany.

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I actually rose under standing order 80(2) regarding unanswered questions.

The SPEAKER: Okay, that is fine.