

## INTERNET ACCESS — MORLEY

### *Grievance*

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Parliamentary Secretary)** [9.20 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Innovation and ICT and I thank him for taking this grievance. It relates to the appalling state of internet access in my electorate of Morley, which covers the suburbs of Morley, Noranda, Dianella and Nollamara. The situation is so bad that businesses are packing up and leaving our area to move to other areas, which is bad for local jobs and for our community. In fact, one major high school has to close down access for other areas of the school when it runs the media class because it simply does not have enough bandwidth to run the media course. It is ridiculous. Students are moving into science, technology, engineering and mathematics areas, which are incredibly important for our future and their futures, but they are hampered by the appalling state of internet access. As a government, we have prioritised STEM subjects in our schools. One of the things that will limit our ability to roll that out is internet access in schools. The overwhelming nature of this local issue came to my attention when I moved into my office in the electorate of Morley. I found that it was almost impossible to maintain a consistent internet connection. It constantly dropped out throughout the day. As I have moved through the electorate over the years, I found that that was the case in a number of suburbs that I now represent. Without doubt, the worst is the suburb of Noranda.

In November last year, I hosted a forum on this issue with Tim Hammond, the federal member for Perth, and Michelle Rowland, the shadow Minister for Communications. Over 120 people turned up on a very rainy Tuesday night. This issue is deeply felt. We heard from people whose children had attempted to go through high school but had to travel by bus to their friends' houses to complete homework and do research. We heard that schools could not function properly and that businesses were leaving the area, particularly those that require the transfer of large files. After that forum, I wrote to Mitch Fifield, the federal senator who is Minister for Communications. I sent him around 100 emails that I had been sent by my constituents about how bad the situation was and asked for a response and an update on the national broadband network. At that point, the NBN rollout was not even planned for Noranda; it was still in the future "to be decided" category. I still have not had a response. The federal government still has not responded to that letter or even acknowledged that it has been received. Mr Fifield had the good grace to acknowledge to the local newspaper that he had received it, but he did not have the courtesy to write to me or my constituents to let them know. That is indicative of the way that this state is treated by the federal government.

Since then, our group has continued to meet monthly. It includes school principals, parents and citizens associations' presidents, members of local business associations and residents. They are talking about this issue and working together to lobby the Western Australian federal Liberal members of Parliament to provide a better deal for us and look at what options are available for our suburbs. We are not on the list to receive the NBN until the latter half of 2018.

Many people are not even that excited about the NBN now because its rollout in the eastern states has been plagued with issues. The federal Liberal government's decision to wind it back to fibre to the node has left people with internet connections that are the same as they already had or worse. We are now at the point at which the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has stepped in and will independently monitor the speeds that people get because of the buck-passing between NBN Co Ltd and internet service providers and their inability to provide what should be the best internet speeds that we have ever seen in this country. The federal government's decision to move from fibre to the home to fibre to the node is probably the biggest missed opportunity in our country's history. Without a doubt, the NBN rollout is the largest infrastructure project we have seen. The fact that the previous state government completely ignored the NBN has not helped WA's case at all. I looked through the previous state government's press releases to see how many times it had mentioned the NBN. Of the thousands of press releases put out since 2009, three mentioned the NBN.

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** One press release mentioned a regional area, which was Geraldton—one out of the three. It was absolutely pathetic! Just because the National Party cannot put a royalties for regions sign on it or cut a ribbon for it does not mean that it is not important. This is the most important infrastructure that we will need for our future. By 2020, the digital economy will be worth around \$139 billion and will make up over seven per cent of GDP. We need to prepare our children, our businesses and our schools for that future. The previous government's total lack of advocacy on this issue is absolutely pathetic.

People are not that excited about the NBN because the fibre to the node rollout still relies on copper infrastructure. When it rains in Noranda, the phones stop; that is what happens. When it rains in Morley, the phones and internet stop. Currently, if they are lucky, people operate on download speeds of around one megabit per second. They cannot stream Netflix on that. Their upload speeds are 0.03 megabits per second. This is a serious infrastructure issue that has been totally ignored. The one glimmer of hope, resulting from being last on

the list to receive the NBN thanks to the previous government's lack of advocacy, is that NBN Co Ltd is looking at what it can do to improve the rollout. The fibre to the node experience has been so poor that fibre to the kerb is being looked at. I am pushing hard for fibre to the kerb for my suburbs and the rest of the Western Australian rollout. I am keen to hear about what the WA Labor government is doing, given that it has prioritised innovation and science in our schools and it has prioritised innovation as a major job creator for the future.

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Innovation and ICT)** [9.27 am]: I thank the member for Morley for that grievance. It is refreshing to have a member for Morley in this place who is willing to take up issues on behalf of their constituents. The member has done a great job in the short time that she has been in this place. My neighbouring electorate shares a little bit of Morley and I hear out in the community about who works hard and who does not. In the short time that she has been a member, the member for Morley has made a big impact on a range of issues.

Sadly, I agree with everything the member said about the NBN rollout. People constantly come up to me and complain about the state of internet coverage throughout Western Australia. They cannot understand why the federal government has yet again treated Western Australia badly on this issue. Without doubt, the biggest failing of the federal government and the Western Australian Liberals is the GST share, but the failure of Western Australian Liberals to advocate for the state on the NBN is probably the second biggest failing. When the NBN was originally proposed by the previous federal Labor government, it was planned to be the biggest step change for our economy. It was going to allow us to take advantage of the new economy and the jobs of the future. There is plenty of research about how many jobs will disappear because of innovation and automation. The challenge for an economy like Australia's, and Western Australia's in particular, is to position ourselves so we can be part of the jobs of the future. Essential to that is having access to good, reliable, high-speed internet. The situation that the member for Morley's constituents find themselves in is, sadly, reflected around Western Australia. I note the earlier interjections by the member for Warren-Blackwood. People in the bush want good internet coverage as well, so I do not understand why the Nationals in this place have not argued more fervently on this issue. They have also let down their constituents.

As I said, the previous federal Labor government's plan for fibre to the home or fibre to the business would have given us first-class, world-standard internet coverage that would have allowed citizens and businesses to really take up the opportunities that exist with new businesses. Sadly, we have not seen that happen. The national broadband network rollout under the current federal government has been woefully slow, and, of course, it has adopted a second-rate option. Its plan of having only fibre to the node and then relying on copper wire to travel the final distance from that node to either the business or the home is second rate. That distance can be a matter of kilometres, so continuing to rely on the old copper network is a great failing. Sadly, that means that when people in Noranda, for example, finally get access to the NBN, the service may not be any better than the one they currently have. I completely understand what the member for Morley is saying. It is a great shame that the federal government has not acted on this and allowed Western Australians to have access to this technology in the way it should have been accessed.

Since I became the Minister for Innovation and ICT, I have written, like the member for Morley, to the federal minister, Hon Mitch Fifield, complaining about the situation in Western Australia and urging him to take action to both speed up the process and improve the quality of the service. Like the member for Morley, I also have not received a reply from the federal minister. I wrote to him in April and here we are towards the end of June and I have not yet received a response. I intend to be in Melbourne in the latter half of July. I am going to send another request to the minister's office asking if he will make himself available for a meeting when I am there. I am available virtually any time the minister wants to meet on this issue—it is so important. As yet, there has been deafening silence from the federal minister in charge. I would like our federal Liberal colleagues—they are constantly talking about how important they are in the federal government—to take up this issue on behalf of Western Australia. Member for Morley, I am well aware that our federal Labor members of Parliament, such as Tim Hammond, have been very active in this space.

I look forward to working with the member for Morley to improve the situation. I, like the member, think that the fibre to the node option is very poor and, ideally, we would like to go back to the original proposal of fibre to the home or to the business. If the federal government cannot bring itself to do that now that it has had a little bit of time to see how poor fibre to the node is, I, like the member for Morley, would like to see the federal government look at installing fibre to the kerb for those areas that have not yet had the NBN rolled out. That will at least enable a future federal Labor government to complete the network. If we have fibre to the kerb, obviously the reliance on the copper network is less and it means that the job of completing the task with a new federal Labor government would be less onerous and expensive. I thank the member for Morley. The issues she raised today are common and I look forward to working with her and other members on these issues.