

TELECOMMUNICATIONS, RURAL AREAS

220. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for State Development:

How is the State Government trying to improve telecommunications within remote and rural Western Australia?

Mr C.M. BROWN replied:

I thank the member for Collie for his question and his concern for regional communications. On 28 August the Government announced that it would be undertaking a review of telecommunication needs in regional, rural and remote Western Australia. I announced at that time that departmental officers would be visiting all nine regions of the State as part of that review. I am pleased to advise the Parliament that the planned visitation program will commence next Monday, 28 October, in the Pilbara. Officers will visit large and small centres and hold public meetings and meetings with interested groups in each of the nine regions. I am also pleased to report to the Parliament that the various regional development commissions have indicated a preparedness to support the inquiry and to provide their expertise. The Government will be calling for submissions to the inquiry through a media release that was put out a few days ago. I indicated at the time that the Government was undertaking a thorough review because, although the federal Government had announced a review, it had a very short time frame and gave people little opportunity to comment. The Government raised that question in this place and said that the review was too quick, that people needed the opportunity to comment and should not be rushed and that a thorough job needed to be done. I reported to this House that the comments I made at the time were supported by the President of the National Party in Queensland, which I was pleased to hear. I am now prepared to report to the House that the Government has had further support for the comments it made about the federal inquiry being rushed. I refer particularly to comments that appeared in the *Busselton-Dunsborough Mail* on 9 October in which the member for Vasse was quoted. The article reads -

Vasse MLA Bernie Masters has criticised the Federal Government for its conduct regarding its inquiry into Telstra's rural services in Australia.

Mr Masters believed that the inquiry was too hasty and he said that the five weeks allocated for public submission was barely enough time for individuals to put pen to paper.

"Five weeks was too short a time for community groups to hold a meeting or circulate a draft submission to members and obtain feedback," said Mr Masters.

He said that he had been critical of Telstra's rural services for several years and said that he was unable to forward his own submission.

"The Federal government has conducted this enquiry with unnecessary haste and since I couldn't provide my comments to Telstra I decided to make them public," he said.

I am happy to report that the member for Vasse will have the opportunity to put his views to our inquiry, because unlike the federal inquiry's approach, we will go to the regions and talk to the people in regional areas. When I first made the comments, the National Party criticised them, but the Queensland branch is now supporting our position as is the member for Vasse. Sooner or later we will drag the rest of the Opposition kicking and screaming to support it, because sooner or later the rest of the Opposition will stand up for rural, regional and remote Australia and try to get decent communication services there.