

**BROADBAND INTERNET — USE OF FUTURE FUND**

*Motion*

Resumed from 29 November 2007 on the following motion moved by Hon Vince Catania —

That this house urges the federal government to support the use of the Future Fund in order to provide the necessary public investment in broadband internet access throughout Australia.

In particular, this house urges the federal government to acknowledge that —

- (a) the urban broadband network is inadequate to meet current or future demands;
- (b) Western Australia's mining companies, pastoralists, farmers and communities function in regions that are as remote from administrative centres as any in the world;
- (c) telehealth capacity would enable quality health services to be delivered via a broadband network to areas where such services are currently impossible; and
- (d) the use of the Future Fund to enable public investment in the national broadband network is a valid and essential means of achieving the aims of the fund by investing in Australia's future in commerce, education and health.

**HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural)** [4.05 pm]: From memory—it is a while since I commenced my speech on this motion—when I spoke previously I pointed out that I agreed with Hon Vince Catania on the importance of broadband internet access throughout Australia. We all know that the size of Australia and the remoteness of its communities mean that good communication is essential. The best broadband coverage that the government can provide is only what the community deserves. It is how the government goes about providing and funding the network that is at issue. The member could even encourage his own state government to take the initiative by progressing trials with Western Power into the possibility of providing BPL, or broadband over powerlines, as was pointed out in Western Power's BPL strategy review.

The 2001 Australian Census pointed out that almost seven million people, or about 37 per cent of the Australian population, are using the internet for either business or recreation. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's quarterly reviews of broadband connections in Australia show that between July 2001 and December 2002, growth increased by almost 300 per cent, with the vast majority of services being provided by ADSL and cable. These figures, however, show that a relatively small number of internet users had adopted broadband as at December 2002. This suggests that there is still scope for other mediums, such as PLC, or power line communication, to play a significant role in the provision of broadband access. This suggests also that the BPL activities of Western Power can be successful, and that a decent share of the growing market can be claimed.

One of the strengths of delivering broadband over powerlines is that all households and businesses that have an electrical outlet are able to access broadband. Also, BPL can be implemented on a targeted cellular basis and can be combined with fibre-optic and wireless technology for hybrid broadband access solutions that take advantage of existing powerline infrastructure. BPL can also support both voice and data services. BPL also provides the potential for value adding, such as surveillance, alarming, meter reading and power monitoring. BPL can also provide a network that will be separate from the incumbent telcos, thereby allowing for independence and quality in last-mile solutions. These are worthwhile initiatives that need to be investigated.

In summing up, although I am happy to support that part of the motion that urges the federal government to provide the necessary public investment in broadband internet access throughout Australia, I do not believe that should be done by the use of the Future Fund. As I pointed out in my previous speech on this motion, once the Labor government starts to draw money from the Future Fund, where will it stop? We should not forget the days of WA Inc, when whenever a pot of money was available, it was spent. Labor's record on managing the economy does not give me any confidence that there will be any money left in the Future Fund in 2020 to cover the superannuation liabilities of federal public servants, which is the very reason the Future Fund was set up. The Labor Party should take heed of an article in *The Australian* of 17 May 2007, which refers to the following comment by the chairman of the Future Fund, David Murray —

Mr Murray said the Future Fund was on track to reach its goal of funding the superannuation liabilities of federal public servants by 2020—currently estimated at about \$140 billion—if it continued to receive the expected federal surpluses.

But he said any withdrawals from the fund before the 2020 deadline would “change the liquidity profile of the fund and therefore change in some way the shape of the portfolio”.

This country is very wealthy as a result of the Howard government's good management of the economy; therefore, there is no need to draw on the Future Fund to achieve broadband internet access across Australia.

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [4.10 pm]: The house last addressed this motion quite a while ago. Indeed, Hon Vincent Catania gave notice that he would be moving this motion on 27 March 2007. Of course, at that stage the nation was in very different and secure hands. The aim of the motion was to encourage the federal government to utilise its Future Fund to install broadband internet access across Australia. We always strive to achieve better access to the latest developments. One can always say that better access starts in the city centres and then slowly generates outwards. Having lived in remote areas for many years, I have long been involved in rural and regional Western Australia. We were always hopeful of getting something better. We did get something better, but it happened slowly. The benefits flowed through after first being experienced in the cities. I do not have a problem with the desire for better broadband internet access across Australia; however, I have a problem with sourcing the money for that better access from the Future Fund. As Hon Brian Ellis stated, the Future Fund was established on the premise that no money would be taken from it until 2020 so that investments would build up and so that the interest from the fund would provide the capital to invest in infrastructure throughout Australia. The Future Fund is a worthwhile cause. It is also self-sufficient. However, if the federal government starts eating into the capital before the egg is laid, so to speak, it will defeat the purpose of having a future fund. In that sense, it may as well use normal funding measures to achieve broadband internet access across Australia. When the Future Fund was set up, it was decided that money from the fund would not be used until 2020 so that it would become self-sufficient and self-perpetuating. Hon Vincent Catania can continue to push this motion if he wishes to utilise the money in the Future Fund, but I believe that the Future Fund should be utilised to address the many other demands in regional Australia. It has been mentioned that the internet can be used to research health issues etc. However, there are many regional health issues. For instance, Mt Magnet waged a long battle before its nursing post was upgraded. Indeed, prior to the upgrade, it was difficult to wheel a stretcher around the corners of the nursing post and into the main rooms. The nursing post used to be the nurses' quarters. It has been upgraded, but a new nursing post has not been built. Two doctors service the Indigenous communities in Wyndham. I believe, however, that the contract of one of those doctors has yet to be renewed. We need to ensure that those facilities are upgraded and kept upgraded for usage.

We could go further and utilise the Future Fund for areas where police stations are being closed down. In Gascoyne Junction, we have shut a police station, a school is starting, there is a hotel and the Indigenous population is increasing. Only recently there was that tragic accident in the Kennedy Range where everyone had to come from Carnarvon instead of Gascoyne Junction. The Future Fund should be utilised for demands on infrastructure. All those issues are far more beneficial than upgrading the internet.

Some of the issues with broadband relate to the cost of it rather than people getting worried about the speed of it. There are four ways of delivering broadband. ADSL broadband uses a phone line. I will not go into great detail about the ways it can be delivered. We can get it by satellite. I used to get it by satellite when I had my pastoral property. It was fantastic to be able to connect to the rest of the world. Of course, it can also be used for educational purposes. However, we will always be striving to have better sources. It can be delivered using wireless technology or by cable. There is no way in the world it will ever be delivered all over Australia by cable but it does happen in certain towns.

The only thing that disappoints me about this motion is that we are tapping into the Future Fund. I believe that we could transfer other wealth directly and not utilise the Future Fund for purposes other than what it is designed for. It should be used for basic infrastructure in regional areas throughout Australia to encourage people to develop and deliver benefits for the future.

**HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.18 pm]: I would like to make a few comments on this motion. I am a little surprised that not more government members are participating in this debate in view of the fact that the Rudd opposition made a very significant commitment to broadband access prior to the last election. Now that the Rudd government has been elected, I guess members do not feel the need to argue their case any more. I was surprised that there was not more enthusiasm from government members for this motion. Hon Vince Catania moved the motion with the best intentions of his electorate at heart, and I support that.

I want to say a couple of things about communications in Western Australia, particularly in remote parts of Western Australia, and also a couple of words about the Future Fund. I suggest that when we vote on this motion we might consider dealing with paragraphs (a) to (d) separately. I find myself in agreement with paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) but I have a problem with (d). If we were to vote for the motion in its entirety, it would be very difficult for me to support the motion because I do not support the use of the Future Fund to achieve these purposes but I support the reasons that we want a better broadband network in Australia. I hope we might be able to contemplate that when it comes to a vote on the motion.

As we have heard, the motion is, in effect, redundant because the Rudd government has been elected. One can only assume that it will go ahead and carry out the commitments it made prior to the election. We should still argue the case—and we will—that any improvement on the broadband network in Australia ought to happen, but not by using the Future Fund. My colleagues on this side of the chamber have explained in some detail why the Future Fund was set up and what its purpose is, and that it should not be touched until 2020. Its fundamental purpose is to ensure that the superannuation liability of federal public servants is fully funded, and that is a very laudable proposition.

The fact that the Rudd opposition, the now Rudd government, determined that it would fund this broadband network expansion using the Future Fund caused a great deal of consternation in the minds of people such as me, because it gave us the impression at least that the Future Fund could be raided for any purpose that a Rudd government thought might be a good idea at the time. Clearly, the Rudd opposition was of the view that broadband was a significant issue in the election and in the minds of people to the point that it was prepared to make an election commitment to use the Future Fund to fund its scheme. That means that whenever the public puts forward a proposal that might require a fair amount of money, the Rudd government might say that there is a nice heap of money in the Future Fund and it will grab that, and that will pay for the demands that people throughout the community might happen to have. That would be a very unfortunate squandering of the Future Fund.

Future funds have been set up in many parts of the world by various governments—I think Norway might have the most money in its fund, if my memory serves me correctly—whereby the benefits of the current economic circumstances, instead of being spent now, are in fact set aside for future circumstances that might result in an economic downturn. In this case, there might be the need to fund superannuation liabilities. Therefore, future funds are a good idea, but we must be very careful about how they are managed, and they should not be there simply as a bucket of money that a government coming into office on the basis of a populist commitment can raid. It would be a very sad day if we set up one in Western Australia—which our party has advocated—and then found down the track that a new government that came into office just spent the money because it had a bright idea to win a few votes. Future funds must be seen as future funds. They are for the future. The fundamental rationale behind them is to ensure that the benefits of the good times can be saved up to cover the bad times that will inevitably happen in the future.

At the moment, Western Australia ought to seriously consider a future fund, in my view. We have very buoyant economic times. Significant surpluses are being achieved by the government—\$2 billion a year for the past couple of years. We are told that the royalty stream from iron ore is going to increase by another half a billion dollars as a result of price increases for iron ore, albeit I understand that a fair bit of that money will go to the other states via the grants commission. However, the state's coffers are in pretty good shape, and if the government tells us that it is getting rid of debt, that is a good thing. However, it also seems to me that the government ought to contemplate a future fund for money to be spent perhaps after 2020, or something of that nature, when some people are predicting that there will be a downturn in the economy. That is the concern that I have with part (d) of the motion; that is, that the money should not come from that fund.

That brings me to the point that there have been dramatic improvements in communications in Australia over the past 30 or 40 years. Those improvements have been brought about by using revenue provided from the general revenues of the country and by the private sector investing its own funds in new technology. Hon Vince Catania said that the Howard government had a flat-earth policy on these sorts of things. I remind him that back in the late 1970s, when there was a federal Liberal government and a state Liberal government, we made the decision to have a domestic satellite for communications. That was the very first serious move by Australia into the modern world of telecommunications. I remember attending a conference in Canberra as a very young, green member of Parliament when the whole issue of a domestic satellite was discussed. We came to realise the dramatic benefits that could be made available to Australia, and in my case particularly to the remote citizens of Western Australia, by having a domestic satellite for communication purposes. That was done by a “flat earth society” party headed, I think, by Malcolm Fraser at the time.

If we look at the way in which telecommunications have improved, there are countless examples of how technology has been improving over the years and how much better our communication system is now from what it was even 30 years ago. When I first came into this Parliament there was no television in my electorate, except in Kalgoorlie, I think; actually Kalgoorlie was not in my electorate. I do not think there was any television. There certainly was none in Exmouth and Carnarvon and those sorts of places. Television is now in every hamlet and every household in Australia, if people use a satellite. Things have improved dramatically. Facsimile transfer, which was just a dream when I first came into this place, is now old technology in lots of ways. We as a society are therefore progressing very rapidly in our ability to communicate through the various methods that are available for communications. The internet, which is an extraordinarily recent innovation, is now showing a huge explosion in the capacity for people to communicate.

However, the problem that Hon Vince Catania and I have in our electorate is that for some reason we are always behind the city. Metropolitan areas of Australia always get new innovations first and the country regions get them secondly. That has been the history of communications in Australia for two reasons: first, consumers live in the cities; and, secondly, the distances involved in remote Western Australia particularly make it expensive and difficult, considering the small population, to provide new telecommunication systems. In the history of this state, therefore, the country areas have always been a bit behind the city areas. That is something that I believe can never be avoided. Indeed, currently we are still a long way behind where we should be on mobile coverage. I might add that I go to Toodyay—50 kilometres out of Perth—on a regular basis and I get halfway there and find that my mobile phone does not work. That should be fixed, and it can be, but it will cost money. I can, however, go to most towns in my electorate and use my mobile phone, as they operate through a satellite system.

We are therefore making progress, but not fast enough. That is why I support the first three parts of Hon Vince Catania's motion, which states —

- (a) the urban broadband network is inadequate to meet current or future demands;

I would be more inclined to say that the urban and non-urban areas are inadequate to meet current or future demands. It continues —

- (b) Western Australia's mining companies, pastoralists, farmers and communities function in regions that are as remote from administrative centres as any in the world;

That is absolutely spot on; that is absolutely right. Technology is there now that will enable all of those remote mining companies, pastoralists, farmers and all the rest to have access to the very latest internet communications opportunities. The technology is there; it is a matter of somebody finding the money for it. It is my view that, because until now we have been able to fund the improvement to telecommunications in this country out of general revenue without raiding a future fund, we should do that in respect of what Hon Vince Catania is talking about in his motion. It should be funded out of the revenues that are currently available to the state and federal governments. I hope that might save the Future Fund for the future and not for something that seems like a good idea now.

The motion talks about telehealth. I am aware of the capacity of modern communications to provide telehealth capacity in Western Australia. It is an extraordinarily beneficial use of technology that assists people in remote areas to have a better health system. It is a fact of life, regrettably, that getting doctors, nurses and other medical persons to live in remote Western Australia is becoming increasingly difficult. It is difficult enough to get sufficient medical staff in the city. It has become an impossible task to provide the on-site medical staff that are needed in every little location around the state. If we can use technology to overcome that problem, we should use it. I agree wholeheartedly with Hon Vince Catania's comment about that.

Hon Vince Catania did not mention education. The use of modern telecommunications in education can provide extraordinary benefits to remote area students. Members would be aware that for generations the students in the School of the Air had to put up with the pedal radio. Anybody who has spoken to a child over the pedal radio would know that, with the crackling and other interference, trying to hear what they said was a virtual impossibility. That was the system of communication for a long time. Now we have modern telecommunications, facsimile transfer, internet and broadband and we can, for example, almost have children in remote pastoral properties in the same classroom as their teacher, who might be in the Leederville centre that provides distant education for remote students.

I will give myself a small pat on the back. When I became the Minister for Education, I discovered that the wonderful centre in Leederville that had been set up as a distant education centre was about to be handed over by the government to the then department of the arts. The transfer had been put in train about a week before the election. A week after the election, when I got the job, I reversed the decision. We made the decision then that education for remote pupils in Western Australia was a priority of our government. As a result, the Leederville centre was expanded to provide the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, which currently exists on the same site. We spent a lot of money on that. Part of the technology we sought to use involved the use of the studios on that site to create virtual classrooms for children in remote Western Australia, and that was to be done by using modern telecommunications. Hon Vince Catania could add to his motion that what broadband internet access throughout Australia could also do is continue to improve education for children in remote areas of Western Australia. With the teacher shortage, particularly in some of our major country and remote centres, that is being done now. Thank goodness for modern technology and thank goodness for the foresight of a former education minister to put money into that facility.

I have a lot of enthusiasm for Hon Vince Catania's motion, with the exception of the reference to the Future Fund. I have no enthusiasm for his comments about the Liberal Party's interest in the Kalgoorlie electorate. Whilst I acknowledge that there was a swing against the Liberal Party at the last election in that seat, I was

interested to hear Hon Vince Catania tell the house that people had been moving into the electorate. I hope they are moving in bodily and have not just had their name registered on the roll, which has been known to happen in the past. Barry Haase still won the seat. I remind Hon Vince Catania that until Barry Haase won the seat in the late 1990s, apart from one occasion in the 1970s, and it might even have been the 1960s —

**Hon Peter Collier:** Mick Cotter, in the 1970s.

**Hon NORMAN MOORE:** I am sorry, Mick Cotter, and prior to him a fellow named Peter Brown. The Liberal Party has held that seat about three times since it was created. That says to me that if a Liberal member—in this case, Barry Haase—can keep winning the seat of Kalgoorlie, he is doing something right. I do not know of anybody who works harder than Barry Haase, and the way in which he covers that extraordinary electorate is a great credit to him. The people of that electorate have responded to the work he does by returning him at each election. I wanted to make the point that we in the Liberal Party are not a flat-earth society. The growth of the north of the state and the growth of the mining industry have been largely attributed to the policies of past Liberal governments. Indeed, recently we saw the passing of Sir Charles Court, the man who in my view set the resource boom going back in the mid-1960s. That boom has seen Western Australia and, indeed, Australia benefit dramatically because of the work that was done by former Liberal governments in the remote parts of the state. The Ord River scheme and many of those visionary projects that have given Western Australia a seriously important economic base were created by Liberal governments, not by flat-earth society Neanderthals, which Hon Vince Catania is somehow trying to suggest we are. I know he was only being facetious when he tried to suggest that if a canal were built from the north to the south of the state, the water would run from the north to the south by gravity. I suspect that some people think that way. However, Hon Vince Catania needs to have a good, hard look at what Hon Colin Barnett was suggesting. It was not his idea; in fact, a very significant international company came up with the idea. It was not about water running downhill; it was about water being elevated at various points on the way down from the north to the south and then running by gravity to the next stage, when it would be pumped vertically and then run down vertically again. The reason for doing that was that it was vastly cheaper than pumping it through pipes. As Hon Vince Catania will know, pumping water through pipes consumes a vast amount of energy because of the friction between the water and the pipe. The bigger the pipe, the less friction and the less energy. The canal idea would have been vastly cheaper, if anyone was ever going to shift water large distances in Western Australia. Indeed, I hope that Hon Vince Catania's comments about that idea do not indicate that he might have said the same thing about C.Y. O'Connor back in the 1890s; that is, that getting water from Perth to Kalgoorlie was flat-earth thinking. It was not, and agricultural areas and the goldfields have benefited significantly from the decision he made at that time. I am sure that Hon Vince Catania made those comments only in jest and was not in any way trying to be seriously critical.

The Liberal Party does not have a problem with the first three parts of the motion. However, as I said at the beginning of my comments and as others have said, the use of the Future Fund to extend the broadband network is an inappropriate use of the Future Fund, and the government should find the money from its normal revenue sources.

**HON BRUCE DONALDSON (Agricultural) [4.38 pm]:** I was not going to contribute to this debate, but I was most interested in a couple of points raised by Hon Vince Catania. He spoke of the Rudd plan to give 98 per cent of Australia access to broadband internet. However, he did not say what would happen to the other two per cent. Was he talking about remote Western Australia, such as stations, farms and discrete communities?

**Hon Vincent Catania:** The whole lot.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** He is not worrying about the other two per cent. I thought coverage already extended to about 98 per cent of Australia. During the federal election, the issue of broadband was raised and it was put on the political agenda. Many members will have seen the cartoon of John Howard and Kevin Rudd wearing open overcoats, looking at each other and saying at the same time, "My broadband is bigger than your broadband." That cartoon was a bit risqué, but it came about because the Rudd plan was going to be bigger than the Howard plan.

**Hon Vincent Catania:** The Howard broadband plan would have covered 50 per cent of the country, whereas the Labor broadband plan will cover 98 per cent, and the remaining two per cent will be covered by satellite or wireless broadband.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** What will the government do for all those people who do not have computers? Australia has an ageing population comprising people who are not that computer literate. It took me at my age a long time to be able to undertake net banking, emails and all those sorts of things. I finally got there by perseverance. With the broadband network and the so-called fast network, when people want to send an email, it will take the same time for them to type it, so they really do not want the speed. Hon Vince Catania is obviously referring to the speed of information coming in when surfing the net.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** You want your emails to get there quickly.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** People can send an email only as fast as they can actually type.

**Hon Adele Farina:** It is when you press the send button.

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** Does the member think that in our modern day and age three seconds will make a difference to our lives?

**Hon Kim Chance:** If you are trying to upload data like a spreadsheet or a photograph, it takes time. The download speeds are generally faster but the upload speeds are slow.

**Hon Ljiljana Ravlich:** Haven't you used a computer, Bruce?

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** I know what goes on. I am merely making the point that it seems this three seconds delay is creating havoc for people in Australia, which I find amazing.

The other aspect of the motion is the Future Fund. The use of the Future Fund is a good, classical case of what happens when the Labor Party gets into power. The Future Fund is a prime example of money that has been prudently accumulated. Prudent managers would not at the first opportunity jump in and raid the capital. An economist recently made that comment, which I think is very true. I do not think that the Future Fund was designed to fund a broadband network.

I would like an answer to this question when Hon Vince Catania responds and winds up the debate on his motion: does he believe that an upgrade of the current broadband service needs a big injection of government money or should it be funded privately? That is a big question. I had a bit to do with Westnet at Leederville a few years ago when I was in local government. We used that service to get information into some of the schools and communities around the state to promote what local government was all about. When we start talking about the use of taxpayers' funds to roll out a so-called better broadband network, should it be funded by the government or private enterprise? For example, the government owns 51 per cent of Telstra and the shareholders own the other 49 per cent. I am wondering why we should be pouring money from the Future Fund into a network service for computers, whether for education or not. Will it make the service quicker and better for schools and the interaction between schools? Will it create a better and faster service for downloading images from scans from magnetic resonance imaging machines to a centrally based specialist for assessment? Will it improve that side of things?

A look at the last census shows that 2.5 million households were without internet access. Of them, 1.4 million were households with children. In most cases, the lack of internet access was because families did not have a computer, or found the current ongoing costs of internet access more than their budget could bear. It is still a very high price to pay on an annual basis. Now a lot of people have actually come off their landline set-up with their service providers and rely only on a mobile phone. That is becoming more and more the case, because it is far more affordable to have just a mobile phone. I wonder where we are going from there.

Talking about communications generally, over the years people from rural areas have complained from time to time about the lack of service. It is interesting to note that sales of two-way radios—which we all used to have in our tractors and trucks and everything else, hearing a continual chatter that used to drive me mad—have gone down. I would turn it off in whatever vehicle I was in, much to the annoyance of my staff who wanted to get in contact with me. They would berate me, saying, “Why don't you leave it on?” I could not stand the idle talk that was going on amongst all my friends and colleagues around the place. Most farmers these days operate with a mobile phone. Even my very good friend —

**Hon Ljiljana Ravlich:** What's wrong with that?

**Hon BRUCE DONALDSON:** I know the mobile phone network is much better than people make out. It has been for some time. I had a call from my very good friend the former member for Moore, Mr Bill McNee. He was busy on a tractor after some rain just recently, getting some ground ready for this current year's crop. I said, “Where are you?” He said, “I'm on the tractor, going round and round; we've had some rain.” I thought it was unusual because that would not have been heard of 10, 15 years ago. It just would not have been possible. Today, there are greater opportunities for communications.

The Leader of the Opposition has said that the opposition supports the first three parts of Hon Vince Catania's motion, but I do not believe that using the Future Fund is a good use of the money. I am not too sure whether the so-called announcement of “We are going to be bigger and better” is really to the point, quite frankly.

Has anyone seen the ads on TV recently about the boy showing a young girl his TV screen? She says, “Oh, but my dad's got a bigger and better screen than that for us.” This boy is a typical, very smart male, of course! He says, “Come and have a look at my swimming pool.” He takes the little girl outside and it overlooks the whole of the ocean. It is somewhere near Mandurah. I thought that was a very good analogy of the way in which Prime Minister Rudd has been talking about the broadband network.

I look at the future of all this and think, "If this is going to be so good, I am going to be even more keen to become very, very proficient with the computer." I shall watch with great interest—one day when I step away from this place—when I can have parliamentary proceedings very quickly downloaded for me on high-speed internet and watch what members are doing in this house. I will be right up to scratch. In fact, members will probably be screaming out, and I will be screaming back with my questions! Who knows? There could be a new interaction between the public and members of Parliament. I think members of Parliament should listen to their public more than they probably do.

I think Hon Vince Catania is on the wrong track. I believe he is trying to encourage the misuse of what the Future Fund was set up for.

**HON RAY HALLIGAN (North Metropolitan)** [4.50 pm]: In common with Hon Bruce Donaldson, I was not going to contribute to this debate, but it is interesting to hear some of the arguments being put forward about broadband and the future and the way in which some of the members on this side have been described as something akin to dinosaurs. However, I can assure you, Mr President, that I try to keep up to date with what is happening. I tried to put my hand out for this you-beaut broadband network which is currently available to us and which is said to be going to get even better in the future. However, I have been waiting and getting older while all this was supposed to be happening. We are relying on government agencies for much of this new broadband internet service. Mr President, it is unfortunate that to date we have been waiting far too long. I believe the technology is there; I think everyone will agree that there is sufficient technology to provide a great deal of what it is that we currently require. Of just how far we can go there is no doubt in the minds of the—some might say very young—technocrats and entrepreneurial types involved in technology who have the vision of tomorrow. However, we do not know what we do not have; we can guess at what we might like to have, but I am not sure that we can handle it in any case. That will require further analysis and probably further argument at some time in the future. Currently, I cannot even receive my emails in this building. This is the technology we have today, and we are talking about something that will supposedly be you-beaut in the future! We cannot even provide the elementary services right now. How much money will it require just to provide those elementary services? I know not. We will talk about the Future Fund in a moment; I am just talking about the technology. Are we in fact being held to ransom? I am not suggesting that we are being held to ransom by the government or the people who work for government, but by some of the service providers such as Telstra, Optus and Vodafone. I continually read about the fact that this technology exists and that there are certain things that they need to do; again, I know not what. Probably more importantly, it is a matter of them receiving moneys—I know not how much money they expect to receive—to be able to provide these basic services that I cannot currently receive.

Of course, we would all like to have these things. As we look back at technologies over the years—Hon Norman Moore has made mention of certain of them—I can remember a time before faxes when we used to use telexes. Of course, some of the younger members opposite will not remember those days—the very young members! I can even go back to *South Pacific*, where they used the coconut telephone, and it worked extremely well and extremely efficiently, unlike the broadband of today! It does not work effectively or efficiently. When we talk about broadband, we normally talk about speed. However, a word that is often ignored or forgotten is reliability. The problem appears to be reliability. It is speedy when it is working, if it is working, but it is not reliable. We need the technocrats to explain to us exactly what can be done and at what cost to make it reliable as well as speedy. There is no doubt that everyone in Western Australia, and in Australia for that matter—we can include the world if we like—would dearly love to be able to communicate quickly, simply and speedily. It is up to the technicians to show us how that can be done at a price we can afford. That is also an important aspect of providing and receiving this type of technology. Telehealth capacity has been mentioned. Although I do not have any experience in that area, I am aware of certain things that can be done that can be of assistance to people, particularly in remote areas. Again, we are looking at not only speed, but also reliability. It is one thing to be able to transfer images of X-rays from remote areas to metropolitan areas where specialists can see them and make a diagnosis; however, if the image of the X-ray disappears on its way to the metropolitan area due to internet unreliability, it is of no purpose. More importantly—I have seen some of this, only on television, I admit, and Hon Kate Doust will no doubt berate me for watching television—it can be an educational tool of itself. Through this medium doctors in metropolitan areas have been able to instruct doctors in remote areas how to carry out an operation. We can imagine the situation if that unreliability I mentioned caused the system to fail in the middle of an operation. It could have disastrous consequences. Not just speed but also reliability are all important.

How can we cause all this to happen. We are being advised that all it needs is money. How much money? Who cares? There is a bottomless pit out there. It is called the Future Fund. The notion exists that we just keep dipping our hand into the Future Fund, putting the money into this area, and it will work, one might suggest, a little like our current health system. When we consider the amount of money that has been put into it, it should be an absolutely first-class system in which there are no delays for people wanting operations and no ramping of ambulances at hospitals and the like. That would be the case if money were the only ingredient required to create a perfect system. However, I suggest that it is not.

Hon Bruce Donaldson also mentioned that consideration should be given to something of this nature being funded privately rather than by the public purse, although the motion moved by Hon Vince Catania refers to enabling public investment in something of this nature, using the Future Fund, the money belonging to the taxpayers of this state and this country, to make this public investment into something of this nature. The difficulty I see with something like this happening is that, with the inefficiencies associated with governments involved in commercial enterprises, insufficient study has been undertaken to determine not only the viability of the operation, but also how much money will be required to bring it to a position whereby not only can it operate efficiently and effectively, but also the users can afford to pay for it.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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