



TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP

NFF PRESIDENT, MR PETER CORISH

13 September 2005

E&OE

CORISH: NFF has been focussed on achieving equitable and afford rural telecommunications now for a number of years. NFF has closely scrutinised the current bills that are before the parliament and we believe these bills should be passed through the Senate in this sitting of parliament.

NFF has been encouraged by some of the key things that we've been looking for in the legislation particularly in regard to a significant strengthening of the Network Reliability Framework. We've been saying for quite some time that basic service telephone repair times in rural Australia are not up to scratch. We have scrutinised that part of the legislation and we are certainly encouraged that what's in there will in fact deliver a rectification of the problems that exist currently.

The Customer Service Guarantee and a strengthening of that particular guarantee is absolutely crucial in ensuring the basic telephone repair times and installation times in rural Australia are in fact maintained and improved.

We believe that the \$2 billion cash telecommunications fund will ensure that we do get equitable telecommunications service and importantly a roll out of new services in years to come. We also believe that the \$1 billion fund can in fact be leveraged up to ensure that we do get a significant improvement in the rollout of broadband over the next couple of years.

NFF has been pushing the Government over recent weeks to deliver on our requirements. We've had a number of meetings in recent days with members of the Government. From members of the Government we have received assurances that our issues can in fact be addressed. So our position is that the current legislation before Parliament should be passed by the Senate and we move forward to improve rural telecommunications in Australia longer term.

JOURNALIST: Last Friday Barnaby Joyce asked your advice whether to vote for the legislation or not. Would you advise him now to vote for the legislation?

CORISH: Well certainly we are saying that this legislation, if passed, will deliver better outcomes for rural Australia, regardless of ownership. We believe that it is imperative that Senator Joyce vote for the legislation to deliver those outcomes.

JOURNALIST: Do you have some concerns (inaudible) satisfy you?

CORISH: We had some concerns over the last few days particularly in regard to the quantum of the telecommunications fund and what that fund would be made up of. We wanted to be assured that we would have parity of pricing in rural Australia for basic telephone repair services and basic telephone lines in times to come. Those issues have been addressed in the last 24 hours in discussions with the government.

JOURNALIST: In what way have they been addressed though – in a commitment you have received?

CORISH: We have received a commitment from the Government on those issues that will give us the assurance and the confidence to go forward.

JOURNALIST: Are you aware that the Treasurer today said that money from the rural regional telecommunications fund or whatever it's called may not start to flow until 2008 at the earliest?

CORISH: Well our understanding very much is that the fund is going to be established sooner rather than later in fact regardless of the sale time. Senator Coonan said that publicly on Sunday. We would believe that dividends from those funds would start to flow in the next couple of years.

JOURNALIST: If it doesn't, what next?

CORISH: We have an undertaking from Senator Coonan on Sunday that the fund would be established and certainly the dividends from that fund are committed to going towards ensuring equitable services in rural Australia.

JOURNALIST: If the money doesn't flow until 2008 would you rethink your support?

CORISH: Well certainly we will need to scrutinise those comments. I haven't seen those comments from the Treasurer as yet.

JOURNALIST: Has a gun been held to your head by Senator Coonan issuing an ultimatum that if the bills aren't passed this week the \$3.1 billion is a no go?

CORISH: Look we've been pushing for improvements for rural telecommunication, and importantly that we get equitable telecommunications, for a long time now. We've held a very consistent position all the way through that we would view the legislation, we'd scrutinise the legislation and come to our own decision and that's exactly what we've done.

JOURNALIST: Mr John Anderson delivered last year a display of how to use the slush fund for his political purposes. The same could be done by a Labor Government as soon as it comes in with your funds. There's no guarantee it'll last is there?

CORISH: We have taken the view for quite some time that strong legislation was the key to ensuring that we would have funding available for rural telecommunications. We

have stayed out of the funding argument because we have always taken that view that the legislation was the most important thing. The legislation with a strong funding commitment which we now believe we have, we believe is the best outcome we can achieve.

JOURNALIST: It's not permanent – it can't be guaranteed. The next parliament doesn't have to do what this parliament does. You've got to face this don't you?

CORISH: We believe that a combination of strong legislation and a guarantee on funding will deliver the best outcome that we can hope for.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible) early as possible review of 2008 are you still critical of the Government's legislation in that respect?

CORISH: When you consider that the Government's position some time ago was that we would have a review every five years, we now have a commitment from Government that we will have a review every three years, we see that as a significant step forward. But very importantly the major issue that we have seen addressed is a commitment to a review of the Network Reliability Framework within two years. That will be before the next election and that will give us the opportunity to publicly scrutinise whether in fact we have seen the improvements in rural telecommunications that we have been looking for.

JOURNALIST: (inaudible) regulations?

CORISH: Our commitment and our focus on strong regulations started two years ago so certainly the changes of Telstra haven't had an impact on that, but as I said we certainly want to ensure the strongest legislation possible to deliver those outcomes. We think that's been achieved and we look forward to a positive (inaudible)

JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

CORISH: Well I don't have to give Mr Trujillo any message. My message to him would be to get on with running Telstra and ensuring that we do get the commitments that have been made by Telstra in regards to fixing up problems in rural Australia addressed as soon as possible.

JOURNALIST: Have you had enough time to look at the legislation?

CORISH: We've been working flat out since the legislation became available to us last Wednesday and last Thursday. Certainly a longer timeframe would have made it easier for us but we have had the opportunity to scrutinise the legislation in detail and we have been able to reach a balanced decision on this and a balanced decision that our Policy Council is totally unanimous behind.

Thank you.

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