



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

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TELEVISION RECEPTION, MOUNT MORGAN

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (7.07 p.m.): I speak for the people of Mount Morgan who, despite living within 45 minutes of the regional City of Rockhampton, are unable to enjoy the luxury of an acceptable television reception. Today I call on the Federal Government to make a commitment to the people of Mount Morgan that it will proceed without delay to meeting its pre-election promises to clean up television black spots.

I acknowledge that the Acting Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Peter McGauran, on 8 July released an issues paper on the \$120m television fund that is to be established from the sale of the additional 16.6% of Telstra. I applaud the release of the issues paper, but I want put in place a realistic time frame to which the Federal Government is committed and that will deliver quality television to Mount Morgan in the shortest possible time.

The people of Mount Morgan have put up with watching ghosts and snowstorms on their television sets for too long. They deserve the quality television that others take for granted. Television reception in Mount Morgan must be at a comparable standard to that of other regional centres around Australia. Quality television for that community is about equity. It is about people being able to access information and to be entertained to a standard that is acceptable to the broader community.

As the local member, I have lobbied State and Federal Governments. I have lobbied television networks. I have put in the effort at the local level by carrying out surveys, meeting with the public and talking with people who have an understanding of what is required to fix the problem. There is no doubt that television reception in Mount Morgan is seriously deficient. A survey was carried out in January last year that showed that 10% of the town's 1,100 households which responded had an unacceptable reception level for Channel 7 and Channel 10. Of the respondents, 77.2% rated Channel 7 as poor, very poor or nil, while 75% rated Channel 10 in the same category. WIN rated highest in the fair, good or very good categories, with the ABC at 62.6%. Only 22.6% of Channel 7 viewers and 24% of Channel 10 viewers indicated a fair to very good reception. Whilst WIN and the ABC had the best reception of those who responded to the survey, 25% and 37% respectively indicated a fair to very good reception. Of the respondents, 92.6% had outside antennas in place and 78.4% of those were high-set. Many of the respondents are unable to view Channels 7 or 10 at any time because of poor reception.

Weather variations also impact on the quality of reception. Because of Mount Morgan's location in the hills, the transmitted signal is not spread equally across the town. There are many blackspots and the only way this problem can be rectified is to strategically place a transmitter in a situation where it can beam the signal to those places that are currently obstructed by buildings and terrain. The advice I have received is that we would need between \$100,000 and \$150,000 to purchase and install the equipment needed to lift signal reception to such a level that it would provide quality television.

The Federal Government now has its 16% sale of Telstra. One of the carrots for public acceptance of the Telstra sale was a promise to allocate \$120m to a television fund to clean up television transmission blackspots and to extend SBS coverage. Mount Morgan and some areas of Bouldercombe—also in my electorate—are just two of the 200 or more transmission blackspots that must be fixed. The Federal Government must get on with the job and not allow the system to control the pace of progress on this quality of life issue. This is an opportunity for the Federal Government to show that it is capable of delivering to the people who are disadvantaged by location. It is important

that we get the same quality of service in Mount Morgan as is enjoyed in nearby regional cities and towns.

I have supported the release of the Federal Government's issues paper, but I question the need for another information gathering exercise because of the research and planning that has already been completed. I know this is accurate because I wrote to the Australian Broadcasting Authority in August 1994. In December of that year I received a letter in response which said in part—

"The Broadcasting Services Act 1992, which came into operation on 5 October 1992, sets out new arrangements for planning broadcasting services in Australia (including planning for improvements to existing services), which is being undertaken by the Australian Broadcasting Authority. An overview of the ABA's role"—

Time expired.
