



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Telstra

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.45 am): I want to draw to the attention of the House my concern about the recent report in the media that Telstra is planning to reduce the number of payphones in the national network by 5,000 phones. This news is very concerning to my government as it will reduce Queenslanders' access to basic payphone services which are vitally important to many people in the state, particularly in rural and regional areas.

While it is true that the number of mobile phones and the mobile phone coverage throughout Australia has increased in recent years, not all sectors of the community have access to a mobile phone. Mobile phone users continue to use payphones when their mobile credit or phone battery has run out or when they need to make important calls and do not want to be cut off unexpectedly. Even ownership of a mobile phone is no guarantee that there will be network coverage, and that includes some CBDs. For many people, especially the elderly, who do not have access to a home phone or mobile phone, payphones fulfil a crucial role in providing basic communication services within rural, regional and metropolitan areas.

In its quest to improve profitability at all costs, Telstra is threatening the provision of a basic telecommunication service to the general community. Telstra should be aiming to improve telecommunication services throughout Australia, not reducing services. It is incumbent upon the federal government to protect the rights of people to have access to these basic, but essential, payphone services. The federal government needs to take the appropriate steps to ensure that Telstra continues to provide minimum essential telecommunication services to all areas.

My government would therefore support an urgent review of the Universal Service Obligation Payphone Location Criteria to ensure that the community is not disadvantaged by Telstra's cost cutting. This latest plan by Telstra to reduce the number of payphones is another example of why my government has opposed, and will continue to oppose, the full privatisation of Telstra due to concerns about reduced service levels.