

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — ENERGY PERFORMANCE

Motion

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government and its Minister for Energy for five and a half years of ongoing mismanagement of our state's energy network that is leaving households and businesses vulnerable to blackouts.

I am the lead speaker for this debate. Before I start on the substance of the debate, I want to reflect a little bit on yesterday when the minister in this place made it clear and alerted that he is going to go through the history of the prior policy of the Liberal Party at the last state election and will quote things. We have a minister who is obsessed with the past, but not a minister who is managing the future. It is fine to sit here and drag things up. My Lord, did we not hear it today! I think we heard members opposite refer back to the years of the Court government, as though it has some relevance to matters or the opposition alliance today. The minister is obsessed with the past and not focused on his job now. I will say in this chamber and I said publicly after the state election that the minister likes to make a lot of the fact that the policy that the Liberal Party had going into the last election campaign was that there should be an early closure of the Collie coal-fired power stations. I was the shadow minister fairly recently and was not part of that decision, but, as the shadow minister, it is my obligation, as is proper as a member of shadow cabinet, that I publicly support that policy. I made very clear after the election that I did not support that part of the policy personally, and I have made that clear subsequently, because the forced closure —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not seeking interjections from the minister.

The forced closure —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: For goodness sake!

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Point of Order

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Madam Acting Speaker, I think the member for Cottesloe made it very clear he is not seeking interjections from the acting Leader of the House.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Minister, you will have your opportunity. Member for Cottesloe, continue.

Debate Resumed

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much.

I am certain, minister, at times you have been compelled to support some parts of policy that you might not agree with, and I do not see you out there publicly doing that, because that would be the improper thing to do in our parliamentary process.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe, if you do not want to have interjections, can you please refrain from —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, please. Member for Cottesloe, please do not taunt. Thank you.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I did not think I was. I thought I was making a general point, but I am happy to follow the Acting Speaker's guidance.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you.

I have made it very clear all along that the transition to renewables in Western Australia is not just inevitable, but that transition is important. There is probably no other place in the world that is better placed to go through that transition. The minister doubled down on this after the election—after we had a resounding loss in the election, which we would have preferred had not happened. The minister directed Treasury to do a costing of our policy that, quite clearly, could never be implemented because we lost the election. The government had resoundingly won the election, yet the minister was wasting Treasury's time so he could score a point in this place. Imagine that. What a waste of time. This is the same Treasury that was responsible for an enormous debacle in the sale of Landgate properties in Midland. It is certain that that sale has robbed the public of Western Australia of many tens of millions of dollars.

If Treasury was not wasting its time on a pointscore exercise for the minister in this chamber and was focused on doing its job of ensuring the protection of the public purse, perhaps we would not have seen that Landgate deal. The minister went even further. He came into this chamber and tabled private correspondence between me and the head of one of his agencies. It was private correspondence that was not copied to a single other person. It was sent to me during the caretaker period of government, yet the minister somehow had that correspondence and came and tabled it in this chamber. What a disgrace! He then doubled down even further and misrepresented what I said in the election campaign.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: There is too much good material to go on with in the general area of energy, but I will go a little further. In large part, the government has adopted our policy including the hydrogen or electric highway—things that were pooh-poohed. The minister made a lot about the 330-kilovolt line from Three Springs to Oakajee, which we said was critical for development there, but also for energy in the state. Suddenly, the government is now hopeful it is going to get some investment. The Minister for Hydrogen Industry came out with an announcement that the government is doing an evaluation and has allocated some millions of dollars to an investigation of the feasibility of installing that 330-kilovolt line, which it said was rubbish. The government said it was going to cost some ludicrous number of billions of dollars and that there would have to be three of them, not one. Despite pooh-poohing it all, it seems that the Labor Party is a keen advocate of pretty well every aspect of the policy we put forward.

This condemnation of the McGowan Labor government's Minister for Energy is warranted on the basis of the following seven points. They have all occurred under this government's tenure and under this minister who has been the Minister for Energy for the greater part of this government's first and second term. The points are: failing to make any notable progress to reverse the declining reliability of electricity supply, especially in rural, metropolitan and semirural areas; failing to respond in a tangible manner to the Christmas outages review recommendations for improving grid reliability in rural areas; failing to resolve the problems around the timely repair of electricity outages due to bushfire rules enacted by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; failing to ensure the timely resolution of the goldfields power outages, which are maintained by the use of backup power generators; failing to publicly release the government's plan for the future of our energy system without the insurance of our coal-powered generators being available; failing to ensure Premier Coal maintains coal supply for our coal-fired power plants; and denying rural communities the benefit of modern life by sudden imposition earlier this year of rules demanding switch limiters be installed if buildings have solar panels attached. We heard today that the minister has suddenly discovered that that point is possible. It is good to see that eventually, thanks very much to my colleague sitting beside me. It was an important matter to resolve and it will have a big impact on people who live in rural communities who suddenly could not install solar panels. Many solar operators were looking at bankruptcy because of the application of that policy when solar panels were being installed.

I will go through these aspects one by one, although I will not be able to go through them in detail because it would be overwhelming to do so. First and foremost, the Minister for Energy is condemned for failing to make any notable progress to reverse the declining reliability of electricity supply, especially in rural, metropolitan and semirural areas. I have raised this issue before and I will keep raising it in this place because we have seen no improvement in the situation. We hear statements from the minister that he is doing something to improve power supply, but, in fact, that is belied by the data. Despite being in office for five and a half years—the minister has had four and a half years in the energy portfolio—there seems to barely be an acknowledgement from the government that a problem exists; certainly, there is no evidence that anything effective is being done about it.

There were extensive blackouts last summer. The Christmas blackouts and the May blackouts affected large parts of not just the goldfields—that was, perhaps, the topical area—but areas right across regional Western Australia. There was also an extensive blackout in Quairading earlier this year, which took far too long to resolve—far longer than it should. We have heard the minister make various excuses. He is very keen to blame others for these things, and in this case it was the load on the system and the system being a long way away from where power generation occurs. That commentary exposes the minister's failure to understand that his job is to ensure that people have power. Yes, there are challenges—we all understand that—and they are not trivial. It is complex and Western Australia is a vast state, but that is the job of the minister. As we have seen, under this minister, power reliability has become substantially worse.

The experience over Christmas last year was worse than usual. It is not an uncommon experience for too many people in WA. I will reveal in a little while how many people are affected by power outages. Members will be surprised to learn the number of people in the state of Western Australia who have to live with power outages. It is clear in the minister's statements, especially for people who live in regional areas—I make it clear that I will paraphrase the minister; this is not a term he has used—that his view is that they should suck it up: "You live in the bush. Get used to it. It doesn't really matter. We won't worry because you're a long way away and there are all these other reasons." Ignoring the plight of those who live in regional areas is indicative of this Labor Party. The

ultimate disregard the Labor Party has for regional Western Australia is evident in what it has done to the electoral system; that is, it has effectively destroyed regional representation in the upper house in Western Australia.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is the Labor Party's disregard. It does not care about regional people. All its votes are in Perth and that is all it cares about. It is pretty evident —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Ministers!

Mr W.J. Johnston: We've got a majority of the vote in the Agricultural Region!

Dr D.J. HONEY: There will be a bit of a change after the next election, minister. I think the minister's popularity rating in regional areas has gone from hero to zero.

We have a lot of evidence of a failing system, which I will go through because it is important. Power outages are obviously the lived experience of people, but, as I said, nearly all people who live in regional communities have had to install backup power supply generation. In regional towns, people are saying, "This is so unreliable. I'm just going to have to get my own generator. I cannot trust the supply of the government network." I have been through the evidence before, but I will go through it again.

I refer members to the Economic Regulation Authority's 2020–21 annual data report for energy distributors, which is the latest report I have obtained. The ERA tells us that the number of customers affected by extended interruptions—meaning power outages of more than 12 hours—rose from 45 000 in 2016–17, which was the last year of the former Liberal–National government, to 98 159 in 2019–20 and 69 995 in 2020–21, which is 55 per cent higher than in previous years. The ERA reported that for rural areas with a standard average outage duration of 290 minutes, or nearly five hours, the result in 2020–21 was about 1 700 minutes of interruption, or more than 28 hours. That is nearly six times higher than the expected minimum standard. Just to be sure that we do not hear the excuse that has been trotted out in the past that this was all to do with cyclone Seroja, if we exclude the impact of cyclone Seroja, we recorded a rural average of nearly 1 400 minutes, being four times higher than the maximum standard. Yes, cyclone Seroja had an impact, but if we exclude cyclone Seroja, the outages are still four times greater than what is regarded as the acceptable standard.

In 2020–21, 42 318 Perth customers experienced five to eight interruptions and 532 103 customers experienced one to four interruptions, which is a total of 575 744 Perth customers experiencing electricity outages in a single year. That data came from question on notice 559 in the Legislative Council. That is clearly not acceptable by any standards. It is not acceptable by Western Power's standards. Given the extent of the underground system in Perth, one might say that is surprising, but it is not surprising when we look at the age and the age profile of the equipment in our power network. The ERA reports that Western Power has not met the standard of average duration of outages for Perth at 160 minutes in the six years reported. In 2020–21, 370 220 Perth customers had outages lasting less than 60 minutes; 301 089 customers had outages lasting between 60 minutes and the standard of 160 minutes; and 238 967 customers experienced outages of more than the standard of 160 minutes. We are not talking about a handful of customers in the network. That is a total of 910 276 occasions on which Perth electricity customers experienced power outages during 2021, which is almost one million power outages in Perth in 2021. That is not an acceptable standard, and, again, it reflects a network that has a large number of issues.

The ERA reports that the acceptable standard for our system for rural areas is 16 interruptions a year. The government accepts—this is not new to this government—that there are that many interruptions per customer per year. A total of 632 customers experienced more than 16 interruptions, and that was the best effort for six years. During 2020–21, 11 603 customers experienced 10 to 15 interruptions. The numbers get massive, at a level that is substantially higher than what is accepted in metropolitan Perth. A total of 270 376 customers experienced between one and 10 power outages. That is a total of 282 602 rural customers experiencing electrical outages, which is probably half of all rural customers—in fact, probably more. We can see why people in regional Western Australia, having experienced that many outages, feel that the power network is unreliable. Government members can shrug their shoulders and say, "It's a long line", and, yes, it is, but the government has to do something about it and something to improve it.

In 2020–21, 327 703 customers in rural areas experienced up to two hours of power outages; 146 630 customers were without power between two hours and the 290 minutes that is the standard; and 86 908 customers were without power for between 290 minutes and 10 hours, which is a total of 561 241 occasions on which rural customers experienced power outage in a single year. When I add them up, it is an overall total of nearly 1.5 million occasions of power outages. We are not talking about the odd power outage here or there. If members look at these outages on the website, they will see that on a good many occasions it is not one or two isolated houses; it is whole areas, whole sections and whole communities without power. That is a troubling state of affairs.

That decline in the electricity supply was confirmed by the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages*, which I will go through. It refers to data outages and states —

This data shows over a four-year period a ‘materially’ worsening customer outage experience trend in CBD and rural areas, with flat performance in urban areas.

I will repeat that, because it covers this government’s term in office. It states —

This data shows over a four-year period a ‘materially’ worsening customer outage experience trend in CBD and rural areas, with flat performance in urban areas.

That is not me saying that. It is contained in the review of those Christmas power outages. The report acknowledged the impact of cyclone Seroja, but that does not account for the materially worsening trend over those four years. Events such as fires, storms and the like are a regular occurrence. We know those things have happened every year, and that will account for some of it, but the bottom line is that this situation is getting worse. There is no comfort even in urban areas, where the situation is flatlining. We are not seeing an improvement in urban areas, only a maintenance of the status quo.

It is clear that we do not see any notable effort by the government to stop this trend and point our system in the right direction. The government should send us in the direction of a system that has better reliability with fewer outages and shorter outage duration times. To the contrary, it is this government’s mismanagement and failure to prioritise investment in the grid, especially in rural areas, that is causing the decline in reliability in our electricity supply. The evidence of that is available in Western Power’s *State of the infrastructure report 2020/21*. I will go through that in a bit of detail because it contains important information. That report informs us about the ageing profile of the equipment. For almost every item in the report, the amount of equipment aged under five years—that is the newest equipment that this government is responsible for—has decreased in every year for the three years that the report covers. It underscores the assertion that the Labor government has not been prioritising ensuring reliability through improving the network and investing in areas of need.

As I will show members, the data speaks for itself. It is not surprising that we have an increasing trend of power outages when the age of the equipment in the network is increasing and we are not bringing in new equipment at a fast enough rate for that network. That report also tallies with the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* that noted that Western Power in the period 2017 to 2022 did not spend \$368 million that it had planned and was approved to spend on capital expenditure. This was for improving the network, adding to the network and making the network a better place. We have discussed that in this place and the minister said that Western Power did not have to spend it. The reality is that Western Power has had almost \$400 million available to it to do that, but it has clearly been underspending on the network, which has resulted in a less reliable network. We should have seen the replacement of equipment in the key categories, thus improving the age profile of the network. Western Power has no financial constraints because it has also been retaining its dividends, so it has plenty of cash.

I will go through these graphs that I have printed out. I have approval from the Speaker to show these to members. I will explain these graphs to members. This graph I am holding shows the distribution of poles. This axis shows the quantity, and each of the three bars on the axis corresponds to the years 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21, going from my left to the right. We can see from the age profile of the distribution of poles in the zero to five-year category that, under this government, the numbers are all going down. If we are look at the six to 10-year range, they are all going up. We are seeing more poles in the six to 10-year range and fewer poles in the zero to five-year range. In pretty well every other category, there has been no change in the age profile, but that means there has been no improvement. It does not mean that it is getting worse in those older categories; it means they are not improving. There is no improvement or replacement there. If that were the case and the government was replacing those older poles, because the two things do correlate, it would go down in the 36 to 40-year range, but it is not. If members look, they will see that none of those categories show a trend that the age of poles is going down; if anything, there is a slight trend up.

This graph I am holding shows transmission structures and exactly the same trend. Worryingly, in the age range of 40-plus years, we see a slight increase, so there has been no improvement in the very old structures in the network.

I can go through these graphs. This one shows transmission overhead conductors. In fact, in the zero to five-year category, we see a near collapse, which indicates a substantial underspend or almost no spend, but it is going up in the six to 10-year category. As I say, in those higher age categories it is only in the 31 to 35-year category that it is going down; the numbers are going up in all the other categories. Again, that is entirely consistent with an ageing profile.

Let us look at the graph for distribution transformers—transformers are critical—we see exactly the same trend. We see the zero to five-year category is going down, the six to 10-year category is essentially static and every other category stays the same. We are not seeing the net replacement of older transformers—transformers aged 36-plus years—in the network.

The graph for ring main units shows the same trend. If we look at pole-top switch connectors, we see the same trend. We see an increasing trend in the very aged ones, which are far and above the largest number. It is the same information for reclosers. Some of this information might bore members. Let us look at drop-out fuses, which are critically important. They degrade over time and, in fact, older fuses tend to fail below the current at which they are designed to fail because they are older. We see with drop-out fuses that in the zero to five-year age profile there are fewer, and in every other category the number for that age is essentially static. In the 36-plus year category, which is very old and well beyond the age that most fuses should be, we see a slight increase and then no change. With power transformers, there is a marginal increase in the zero to five-year profile and essentially no change in the older categories. The list of graphs include switchboards, circuit breakers and the like.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Are you tabling those?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am happy to. It is a publicly available report that I referred to.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I stand corrected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Going through all those items, we consistently see a network that is getting older and we do not see any improvement in the age of that network. No wonder we see problems. No wonder when we have a hot day, we see problems in that network and the power dropping out. The devil is always in the detail, but those graphs do not tell us where that money is being spent. I do not think one would have to be a rocket scientist to imagine that the majority of that money will be spent in metropolitan Perth and not the regional areas. Those graphs tell the truth. As I say, the minister can say the government is improving the network and the like, but on the evidence that is available to us and to the government, that is not the case at all.

I will now go to the second point, which is the failure to respond in a tangible manner to the Christmas outages review recommendations for improving grid reliability in rural areas. Following those outages, the minister did at least arrange for an independent review to be carried out, and that review made some excellent recommendations. Some members will have seen it. The review recommended that Western Power improve distribution network forecasting; review its planning criteria to ensure that it is fit for the future; continue to improve to reduce the risk and length of outages; review its fire risk response in light of the community impacts of prolonged outages, particularly during heatwaves; improve customer and stakeholder communication in line with customer expectations; and increase transparency about reliability in communities. I hope the minister will use part of his contribution to say where the response to those recommendations is at, rather than giving me a history lesson. They are good recommendations. It is a good review. As I said, the minister did the proper thing in ordering a review of what was a horrendous situation for many people in regional Western Australia, particularly in the goldfields. What has happened with those recommendations? For some considerable time, I have not heard any detail about that from this minister.

Recommendation 6 is probably the most important. For communities experiencing poor service, it recommends identifying “the causes of reliability problems and the plans to address those in the future”. That is absolutely paramount. There is not much point in doing a review without going to the root cause of the problems and coming up with a plan to solve those problems in the future. We have seen that the age of the equipment is not unimportant, so what is happening? Where is the plan? Perhaps the minister could use his reply to tell us what that plan is, maybe even table it. Maybe he could communicate with his officers and get them to bring it in.

In response to these problems, communities are having to get their own backup generators. Previously in this place I have read out a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* responding to the Premier’s comments that reliability in rural areas was acceptable, despite all the evidence; I think the Premier was probably parroting the Minister for Emergency Services. It is quite a good response, so I will read it again. It states —

Premier Mark McGowan should come and live in Port Denison/Dongara if he thinks Western Power’s reliability is acceptable ... The real sufferers are those who cannot afford generators which probably half the community has because the power supply is so unreliable.

That was a letter to the editor of *The West Australian* of 2 June 2022 by Mr Jim Waddell of Port Denison. It goes to the core of the problem. It is easy to sit in metropolitan Perth and say, “Shucks! Folks in the country should just put up with this poor reliability”, but it is not so funny for those people. I do not think anyone in this place would think it was acceptable to be without power for four or five days, yet the Premier says, “No. Things are fine. The government has the system under control.”

Times have changed. When I was a little kid, we had kerosene fridges and Tilley lamps. That was probably unusual at the time—not completely unknown, but unusual. Then we put in our own generator; we had a small diesel generator. We did not have a plethora of electrical appliances in our house, though. Our communication did not rely on mobile phone coverage, which for many people is now their only means of communication, so it is especially important. We did not rely on internet communication. For many regional communities, when the power goes out, they not only lose the electricity to their house and to their fridge; because the phone towers do not have backup for

more than a couple of hours, typically, they lose all their communication. They lose all their internet communication because much of the internet communication goes through towers, not through fixed cable from house to house.

For people in regional communities, like people in metropolitan Perth, reliable power supply is crucial to the way they live. It is crucial for small businesses. When the power goes out, businesses cannot conduct transactions. Very few people deal in cash these days. We cannot just say, “Shucks! They are in the bush. It should be less reliable.” It is critical, particularly in the large regional towns. So, I ask the minister: where is the plan? That was one of the recommendations he was to respond to. Where is that detailed analysis and the plan to say how we are going to do better and how this work is going to be improved?

I now turn to the third point, which is the failure to resolve the problems with the timely repair of electricity outages due to bushfire rules enacted by Western Power in response to Department of Fire and Emergency Services declarations of total fire bans and vehicle movements. I will say at the outset that it is proper that Western Power considers the issues of bushfire risk and the like; that is obviously entirely appropriate, but Western Australia has been an absolute outlier in the types of conditions in which Western Power workers are allowed to come in and work on the network. We see enormous delays even when the fire risk is minimal in the area that is affected and even when there are adequate safeguards that can be put in place. That problem has clearly been exacerbated by internal rules that have been put in place. I heard the minister say that was going to be reviewed, but we have not seen any outcome. What is the outcome of that examination? Western Power does have options; there are some caveats in the rules, but we have seen enormous delays, to the exasperation of communities. There are adequate fire services available to communities. The risk is clearly minimal to extremely low, no greater than in ordinary conditions, yet Western Power is not doing the work. As I say, I expect that Western Power does things in a prudent way, but what is clear is that the rules have been applied in an extreme way that has caused extreme delays to network repairs. I heard the minister say that there would be a response to that, and I would like to hear it. Has there been a material change? Will that work be carried out in appropriate circumstances, without the extreme delays at times when there is little fire risk?

On the fourth point, the failure to ensure the goldfields’ power is maintained in a timely manner by the use of backup power generators, I will give the minister credit. That has changed; the tragedy is that it took so long. I will go through this in a little bit of detail because it is fascinating to compare what has been said in this place with what the people responsible for the operating the equipment say. The minister makes much of the fact that there were other issues affecting the Christmas outages, but one of the material problems was the time it took to provide backup power, not just for that outage but for the May outage and also more generally. It took some considerable time for the minister to make a change.

There have been lengthy outages in the goldfields region. Imagine the sense of despair that people in that region feel when they know that there are two first-class backup power stations in the region—two of them. One is owned by Synergy, which has a contract to provide backup power, and the other is the privately owned Parkeston power station, which can also provide power into the network very rapidly.

When I raised this issue and those outages, I was told that the backup generator was not started up immediately because bureaucrats in Perth were making decisions guessing how quickly they could fix the outage. I should say that when I was first told, I was told it was impossible to start it up quickly; it could not be done in less than two or three hours. I will go through that aspect a little. It is interesting how this decision would be made. Just imagine someone sitting in Perth in an air-conditioned house with the lights on. They are not losing all the goods out of their freezer, and they say, “Do you reckon it will be fixed in two hours or not? I reckon it will be fixed in two hours”, but then it takes three or four hours and it still does not get started up, and we end up with these enormously lengthy outages in regional Western Australia. That was the situation in the regions.

I go back to some of the information we are told. The minister sat there in estimates hearings on Thursday, 26 May 2022 and was asked how long it takes to start those generators up, and we were told that it takes two to three hours. We were told that the generators have to ramp-up, and as they ramp-up, they put on some load, but it takes two to three hours. Time does not permit me to go through Mr Barbaro’s response in detail, but that is what we were told. The minister said, “Yes; that’s it”, but it took only a five-minute conversation with the engineers responsible for running that power station to learn that that is completely untrue. I thank the minister for letting me talk to Synergy. The minister allowed me to visit Synergy and I thank him for that, but when I talked to the engineers and asked how long it takes to start up those generators and get electricity onto the network, they told me it takes 15 minutes, not two to three hours. The minister comes into this place and quite often says there is a separation between what a minister does and an agency. An agency manages its own affairs, and, as a minister, he does not interfere in its day-to-day operations. However, the job of a minister is to ask the key questions. The job of a minister is to challenge those agencies, not to just accept what they change. If the minister sees fit—as he has done, or I think he has done, on at least one occasion—he can actually direct in writing what the agencies do and say, “You have to do this.” A minister has enormous power, but it is the minister who is ultimately responsible. That is our whole system of government. Ultimately, the minister is accountable. Whether it is a government trading enterprise or not,

its failures ultimately are the minister's failures. We on this side are apparently accountable for what our parties did 30 years ago, but I can tell members that if that is the case, this minister is responsible for what the trading enterprises are doing today.

Mr P.J. Rundle: WA Inc!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, there you go! We will bring that back.

The minister appropriately says that he is not in there every day. He is not turning the switches or fixing the generators and the like, but he could have asked exactly the same question I did. It was an obvious question to ask. Is that really true? That is the job of the minister. In fact, the engineers told me they can start putting load on in less than 15 minutes. There are two Synergy generators. One controls frequency, which is critically important on the network, and the other generator is synced to that. Once they start up the first generator that controls frequency, they can actually put load on as it is firing up. They can start bringing load on in less than 15 minutes, not the two to three hours that the minister was persistent about.

I understand a direction has now been given to Western Power to do that and make sure that it starts it. Despite some significantly severe storms coming through Kalgoorlie since then, that town has not been without power for extended outages. It is pleasing to see that change, but that came about only because of challenges from this side of the house. It took way too long for that issue to be resolved.

The fifth point on the list of this minister's failures concerns the minister's energy plan. The minister said that he has an energy plan, but I say that this minister has failed to publicly release the government's plans for the future of our energy system without the insurance of our coal-powered generators being available. That is an issue of extreme concern for the future. The minister's approach is largely, "Trust me!" The minister recently announced the firm plan for the closure of coal-fired power plants as part of the future. We have asked the minister to release that plan, and the minister has said no. During question time in this place, I asked the minister —

I refer to the minister's comments on 6PR when he stated that he has a detailed plan —

This relates to the shutdown of the coal-fired power stations —

and detailed financial analyses that support his decision to close the Collie and Muja power stations completely by 2029. Will the minister table the detailed plan and financial analyses so that everyone can see what he is proposing; and, if not, why not?

The minister is hiding. He said that it is Synergy's plan; it is not actually his plan and he cannot do it, so he hides behind the agency. In his reply, the minister talked about other generic plans. He encouraged members to go and have a look on the web as there is a lot of stuff there. It sounded fantastic! There is a transition plan. There are all these plans, but they have no detail. They do not have the detail that people require, and our community deserves to know those plans. This idea of, "Trust me. Don't worry; I will get it all right", is not —

Ms J.L. Hanns: Two thousand and twenty-five.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Will we see the plan by 2025? That will be an interesting election year, member for Collie–Preston. It is certainly one we will be making some moment of. We need that plan. There is some good work being done. I know the minister is well-read and he likes to study. The minister should study the Queensland plan because the Queensland government—the minister's government's political allies in Queensland, if you like—has published the *Queensland supergrid infrastructure blueprint*. That government is open and transparent with the people of Queensland in the detail of the plan. It has the same problem as us—in fact, more so: Queensland relies more heavily on coal-fired power generation than we do, but it has published the detail of the plan. We have a minister who tells us that he is on top of his game and he is doing all this work and has task forces doing this work. Here is Queensland, which has a bigger problem than ours in transitioning from coal, providing the detail on how it will beef up its grid and transition to renewables.

The Queensland government has put it in a form that the people can understand. The plan has a 20-page summary and then the detailed plan. Where is the minister's detailed plan? Do not point me to some vague spin doctor's document on the web that talks in generalities and says, "Yep; we're going to do it." Where is the plan? Queensland has a detailed plan with costings and everything in it for the people of Queensland, but the people of Western Australia are left completely in the dark. I say that with no pun intended. People are completely in the dark on what the minister has planned. The minister says he is looking into it and he has the Australian Energy Market Operator on the job and all these task forces going. Queensland is in a far more difficult situation than us, and it has that plan. Where is the minister's plan? He is not being open and transparent with the people of Western Australia about going forward, but he expects people to trust him.

The sixth point in the obvious failures of the minister relates to the coal supply problem in Collie. The minister has answered some questions in this place, and what do we hear? We hear the same old thing: "It's commercial-in-confidence", "It's a government agency that the minister does not manage" or "They have a contract with Premier Coal."

But the buck stops at the top. I cannot imagine that in relation to problems within an agency, members opposite ever accepted the Liberal–National government ministers saying, “Oh, shucks. Nothing I can do because I can’t see anything. I don’t know what’s going on”—absolutely not. The minister can demand any information from Synergy. The minister can give written direction to Synergy at any time. If the minister is not being informed of a problem that is looming, the minister needs to look at the people who are reporting to him because that is unacceptable. In this case, I find it incomprehensible that the minister did not know there was a looming problem and that suddenly, out of the blue a few weeks ago, this problem raised its head. I think that the minister must have known a problem was looming and he cannot hide behind this view that Synergy is a government trading enterprise and therefore he cannot do anything. The minister could have done something.

Imagine this ludicrous situation. I am dumbfounded, member for Collie–Preston. I will be fascinated to see how the member justifies this to the people of Collie and her union colleagues if we ever see a bag of coal coming from Newcastle to Collie. I think that would pretty well be the greatest day of shame for the Labor Party in Western Australia. Apart from the fact that there is very poor unloading capacity for coal at Bunbury and none at Fremantle, imagine seeing truckloads or container loads—goodness knows what form it would come in—of Newcastle coal coming into Collie because this minister had let us reach a situation in which coal supplies were not being provided.

The minister says that he cannot interfere in this or get involved. That is rubbish. That is not true. This minister can give written direction to those agencies at any time to do a whole range of tasks. There is a contract with Premier Coal for the provision of coal, and the minister can look into that. I see companies entering into arrangements or starting various enterprises, and I see ministers happily sitting beside those company people taking all the credit for the stuff they have done. When a mine opens or someone announces a hydrogen project at Kwinana, we see a minister right there lining up with their support crew behind them who want to get in the photo as well. We see them lining up to take credit and saying they were responsible for that, but when we have a problem, they say, “Oh, no!”

Mr P.J. Rundle: It was the previous government.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is right; it was Richard Court’s fault! The ministers say, “Oh, no! We can’t do anything about this because this is a commercial arrangement.” They are happy to claim the glory when business does something, but all of a sudden when there is a problem with a business, they cannot do anything. I know that the Minister for Energy and other ministers sit down with businesspeople. I know that when there are issues, they sit down and talk it through and so on, so to suddenly say that they are all hands off and there is nothing they can do is not true. The minister might not be able to direct a business, and I certainly would not expect him to do that, but he can have those discussions and can let it know what the issues are. He can direct agencies that are under his ministerial control. I hope this is wrong. I hope we do not see a single piece of coal coming through. But I will push on because I still have the last one to cover.

The seventh deadly sin—we might say—is the expectation that people in rural communities should accept a second-best standard. Yes, it is harder, but we have already seen this government make decisions. The rate of return on some of the Metronet projects is as low as 30 per cent. That is what we have seen from this government. The government does not always need to have a business case. The Minister for Transport said the reason for that is even if one student caught public transport, it was justified. I found that a little bit dumbfounding because I think the government could buy them a new helicopter every day from the money it is spending! Nevertheless, the government does have to spend money on things, but people who live in rural communities should not expect a second-best standard.

The reality is that the minister has seen a decline in the reliability of our electricity supply, more outages and older equipment. We hear lots of statements from the minister and hear his lectures to this side of the house, but we do not see the detail of the plans that he has in place to fix that system.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [4.55 pm]: Firstly, I want to address something. I am not going to reply to everything the shadow Minister for Energy commented on, but my staff were with him when he visited the Synergy plant at Kalgoorlie and I want to make this point. I have always said—I have said it on radio, in Kalgoorlie and to everybody—that it takes about 15 minutes to kick off an open-cycle gas turbine, which is exactly what it is. That has never been the issue. I have been on radio in Kalgoorlie. I have fronted the media personally at media conferences. I have spoken to the *Kalgoorlie Miner* and I have been on ABC radio. That is not the issue. The issue is the time it takes to reconnect the load. The member is so silly. He quotes what Mr Sam Barbaro, the chief executive officer of Western Power, told him in estimates, but then ignores what he was told. The member cannot have this both ways. He cannot ask for the information, not from the minister but from the technicians who run the system, and then ignore what he was told in the same way that he ignored what he was told about his election stunt when he claimed, in this chamber, that the government trading enterprise CEOs had endorsed his project, even though he had it in writing that that was not true.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Member for Cottesloe, you did not like anybody interjecting.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I did not interject.

Western Australia's electricity system is among the best in the world. The south west interconnected system is a very large grid, which makes it hard to operate. It services only a relatively small population over that huge area, which also makes it hard to operate. It has one of the highest amounts of renewable energy content anywhere in the world, which also makes it complex to operate. It also has one of the largest swings in demand—that is, from trough to peak—of any system in the world, which also makes it hard to operate. However, although it is very complex to operate and manage, we are actually managing it well. It is a credit to the hardworking and highly skilled workforce at the Australian Energy Market Operator, Energy Policy WA, Western Power, Synergy and private generators that it is very reliable.

It is also a credit to the rapid and correct decisions being made by the McGowan Labor government that is allowing us to keep pace with this incredible complexity. We are taking the required actions to keep pace with change. We are implementing the rules. We are building the infrastructure. We are responding to the changing environment. Operating the SWIS is getting harder each year. It is more complex now than it was 20 years ago, much less 100 years ago. The SWIS used to be very simple. It was a big power station, poles and wires; we just had to send out the bill. That is not the way it works anymore. We need to reduce carbon pollution. We need to allow for rooftop solar. We have to adapt to be ready for new technologies—wind farms, batteries, virtual power plants and electric vehicles. This is not about choosing new technologies; they are arriving anyway. It is about keeping the system going in a new and dynamic state.

Even just five years ago, system load was not an issue. What is the lowest volume of electricity that can be used by the network and still allow it to function in a stable format? In 2019, not long after I became minister, I was told the system could not function below 900 megawatts. Last weekend, it reliably performed at just over 600 megawatts. In 2012, when I became the shadow Minister for Energy, no-one had ever heard of emergency solar management. Now it is a regulated requirement for all new rooftop solar installations. We are solving problems that no-one knew existed, and we are doing it without massive increases in costs for residential consumers or reduced reliability. We are leading the world in these important changes. Energy experts from around the world want to learn from us because we are leading on 100 per cent rooftop energy microgrids, community batteries, low-load scenarios and distributed energy resources. We are leading the world on energy policy and the application of these technologies.

Members just need to read the eighth report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee of the last Parliament, which was tabled on 20 February 2020, to get a picture of what is happening. Climate change is making things harder still, with more hot days. Hot days drive up energy consumption; they increase the peak load and make things harder to manage. They add to all the new electric gadgets that we all have, which are also driving up electricity usage. More extreme hot days make things even harder to manage; frequent extreme hot days make things harder still. The electrical equipment in the distribution system—that is, the poles and wires that bring electricity to people's homes and small businesses—is all air-cooled. A run of hot nights can stop mechanical equipment cooling down, increasing the risks of mechanical failure. Extreme hot weather increases bushfire risks, which have to be managed, and slows down repairs, because we also have to manage employees and their exposure to heat. Extreme hot weather can also lead to more environmental impacts on the network infrastructure because of high winds. It is much harder to manage the system today than it was 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago. However, when things go wrong, the McGowan government is 100 per cent transparent. For last year's issues over Christmas, we commissioned Michelle Shepherd to independently review the issues and we published her report in full. We are now implementing her recommendations, and I note that the shadow minister has never actually asked me about any of those issues during question time or at any other time.

I now want to say something to everyone who is listening: no electricity system can be 100 per cent reliable, but the south west interconnected system is 99.8 per cent reliable. I can tell members another thing. People who say that they can make electricity 100 per cent reliable are simply lying. I will not lie to the community; I will not lie to the community, ever. I want to encourage everyone to read about the electricity system: read the report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee of February 2020; read the *Distributed energy resources roadmap*; read our DER road map annual updates; read the final report of the energy transformation strategy; read the Australian Energy Market Operator's website and all the reports that can be found there; read the Economic Regulation Authority's report; and read Western Power's website. All the organisations involved in managing the SWIS are 100 per cent transparent. Everything we need to know is publicly available. Of course, there are power outages on occasions, just as there are in every electrical system in the world.

Modern society is very electricity dependent, more so today than it has ever been in the past. That means that when there is an outage, it is even more inconvenient. The McGowan government does not want to see anybody without electricity at any time, and we will always do what we can to prevent outages. When outages occur, I take

responsibility for it and I always apologise. I have always fronted the media or ensured that Western Power or AEMO is available to explain what has occurred. Indeed, I have met with many local governments across regional Western Australia, and I have directed Western Power to improve its communication with regional councils.

The south west interconnected system is a good system, and we are working to make it better. Of course, there are critics; we expect that. For example, let us look at Paul Murray's opinion piece, published on 24 September. In his piece he refers to —

... the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) run by the government-owned monopoly supplier, Synergy.

That is completely incorrect. The south west interconnected system is operated by AEMO. The south west interconnected system network—that is, the poles and wires that carries the SWIS—is operated by Western Power. Synergy produces less than half the electricity used on the south west interconnected system, which is not a monopoly.

He then falsely said that the capacity issues for this summer were caused by coal closures, yet he had information from AEMO in relation to what was causing the issues this year, which states —

... is driven by a combination of forecasted increases in demand, along with extended generation outages, fuel supply constraints and project delays ...

AEMO does not say anything about coal closures causing issues this summer. In fact, this is what AEMO says about the government's decision to close the coal-fired power station owned by Synergy in Collie —

AEMO welcomes the certainty for the Western Australian (WA) energy market provided by today's announcement —

That is, in June —

from the WA Government on its intention to close the existing fleet of Synergy-owned coal-fired power stations, the Collie Power Station and Muja D Power Station.

The quote continues —

The announcement will enable new investment to proceed with confidence and confirms the energy transition underway in WA.

Mr Murray said that AEMO is against it; AEMO itself says it is in favour of it. I want to table a copy of the media release from AEMO of 14 June in which it welcomed the decision, and I also want to table the email that was sent from AEMO to Mr Murray in which it answered the questions he was asking and on which he based his article.

[See papers [1587](#) and [1588](#).]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do not mind Mr Murray having a different opinion from mine; I just wish he would base his views on facts. Further, the whole discussion on challenges around South32's Worsley refinery in his article is just completely incorrect. Synergy does not buy coal from Griffin, South32's principal supplier, so how could changing Synergy's coal purchases from Premier Coal impact on Griffin Coal? Do not forget that Synergy's Muja C, unit 5, did not close until 29 September this year—five days after Mr Murray published his opinion piece. I would be interested to know how an event in the future affected a situation in the past.

Of course, it is true that the rise of rooftop solar means less need for coal power plant operation, but that is technological change operating in the free market. That is the point I keep making: economics is driving coal retirements, not ideology. I understand that this simple fact does not suit Mr Murray's old-fashioned views, but it does not change the facts. I apologise to Mr Murray for clouding his worldview with facts. Mr Murray also stated —

Only in recent days have there been closed-door meetings involving State Development Minister Roger Cook and Energy Minister Bill Johnston with stakeholders as the gravity of the situation dawns on the Government ...

Yes, we meet with all the coal industry participants, but we did not just start doing that. We have been having meetings with coal industry players since 2017. My job as Minister for Mines and Petroleum and more recently as Minister for Energy is to find out the facts. It might suit Mr Murray to form his opinion based on ideology, but I prefer to use facts to guide my opinions. Mr Murray does not understand the reasons for the capacity shortfall for this summer, even though he has been told the facts by AEMO. That means he misdiagnoses the problem and jumps to the wrong conclusions.

I make it clear: our June 2022 coal closures affect 2025 and 2029, not 2022 or even 2023. Mr Murray is simply wrong, wrong, wrong. I have said in 2019, in 2020 and every time I am asked, that as the volume of coal required by Synergy goes down, the price charged by Premier Coal will go up. That is because we need coal until we do not need coal. This is not ideology; it is just common sense. Lower volumes of coal from Premier will cost it more per tonne; we understand that. Our coal retirement plans are measured, sensible and necessary, and are driven by economics,

not ideology. They have the benefit of reducing carbon pollution, but they would occur even without the climate constraint, because of the changing technology in the electricity system.

To explain another issue that appears to be beyond Mr Murray, the principal generators used to balance renewables are open cycle gas generators, which are ideal for so-called ramping—that is, responding to variability in electricity supply and demand. Over time, this will be supported by batteries, which are even faster at responding than gas turbines. The very reason coal plants are playing a decreasing role in high-renewable energy systems is that coal plants are less flexible. They are not good at ramping. In fact, frequent ramping increases their operational costs and potentially reduces their reliability. This information is widely available to everyone in the energy system. It is not as if what I am saying is a surprise to anyone who has actual knowledge of energy systems. As I say, Mr Murray is entitled to his opinion, even when he is clearly wrong, but I pose a challenge for Mr Murray: it is time for him to put up or shut up. I invite Mr Murray to debate with me the management of the south west interconnected system in front of an industry audience. I am sure that the Australian Institute of Energy or the Energy Club WA could host the debate. I am sure that one of them would be happy to host us. However, if Mr Murray is too scared to have a genuine debate with me in public in which he can be held to account for his errors, then he should stop writing these misleading opinion pieces. Opinion based on ideology is not information. Fallacies are not facts.

Now let us turn to the member for Cottesloe, who uses Mr Murray's opinions as the basis for his opinions. For a man with an impressive CV, he is not an impressive shadow minister. On 10 October 2022, he criticised Synergy for proposing to bring coal from New South Wales to make up for the short deliveries from Premier Coal. What would the shadow minister do? Is he saying that Synergy should just cop having an insufficient coal supply? I support Synergy taking the actions it needs to take to ensure that it has sufficient coal. That includes reducing coal consumption now to use it in January and February and arranging for its coal supplier to bring coal from interstate if that is needed. I would hope that it is not needed, but, if it is, it should occur. Premier Coal is a private company and, exactly as explained in question time yesterday, the WA government cannot control Premier Coal. In exactly the same way that Bluewaters Power does not control Griffin Coal, Synergy does not control Premier Coal. The shadow minister can reject the truth, but it does not change the truth.

The shadow minister implied that I am not being honest with the community about the problems at Premier Coal. Let me remind the house what I have said to the media. I do not speak for Premier Coal and the media should ask it why it is having issues delivering coal to Synergy. However, I was advised of the issues, and I reported those to the media. Those comments were simply the truth. No amount of assertions from the shadow minister can change the truth. In fact, I will ask a simple question. Next time the member is on his feet, he can explain this. What did Premier Coal say to the shadow minister when he contacted it to ask it about the problems, or has he been too lazy to talk to Premier Coal? Further, the shadow minister said in his opinion piece that Synergy —

... experimented with shutting down ... Collie coal ... stations ... last year.

That is wrong again, member. For six weeks last year, the Australian Energy Market Operator did not call Collie, because it was not needed. I have said that in the chamber on many occasions and I have said it to the media. I just hope the member will start listening occasionally.

I make it clear: I have never said that we do not need coal-fired power at the moment. As I keep saying, we need coal-fired power until we do not need coal-fired power. The McGowan government is spending \$3.8 billion to replace the coal stations. It is a seven-year project. It is a major investment. Our careful plan is responding to the economic issues and recognises the technological change. It will also bring significant benefit in reducing carbon pollution, which is essential for our future, our children's future and our grandchildren's future. Comparing WA with Queensland just shows how little the shadow minister understands about Western Australia's energy system. Queensland is part of the national electricity market. Queensland exports electricity to New South Wales. The SWIS is a standalone system. We cannot export electricity to balance supply and demand. That is one reason our system is so much more complicated than the national system.

The member says that we intend to bring forward closures to 2029. That is rich from someone who promised that if he were the Minister for Energy, all the coal plants would have closed in 2025, and that they would all close at once, not staged over seven years. We have a sensible, considered plan. We are being careful. We are staging our actions. We are building new infrastructure. Exactly as AEMO says, we understand the need for firming, which is why we are leaving the option for additional gas infrastructure if that is required. But the question that the shadow minister has never answered is: what happens if we do not carefully manage closures like we are doing?

We can see what is happening in the rest of the world, including on the east coast of Australia. We see rising costs. There is a 30 per cent jump in costs on the east coast. We see increasing supply risks. Just look at the challenges of keeping the coal units on the east coast and in other parts of the world. That forces rapid and unplanned closures, which sees energy chaos. It is one of the issues that Alinta Energy, AGL Energy Australia and other companies are all talking about: do not leave it in an unmanaged format because then we get rapid closures and that is chaos.

It is a pathway to nothing. It is a myth. It is a ridiculous comment from the shadow minister and it reflects badly on him. It is just asking for a mess.

Unlike members opposite, we are not letting ideology drive our decisions. The last decade of the federal Liberal–National government allowed ideology to stop good policies. I am not going to let the Liberal–National opposition undermine common sense with its ideology.

Let us go through just a few of the things that the shadow minister was previously so proud of. He now walks away from *The Liberals new energy jobs plan*. I assume that he is going to tell people that it was not his idea. I have it here in front of me. I quote from the shadow minister’s document —

Phase out all state-government coal-fired power stations by 2025, reducing stationary greenhouse gas emissions by 84%, within four years of government.

That was his position. It is not like he was not challenged on it.

Ms J.J. Shaw: There was the debate, minister, at the Australian Institute of Energy.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am going to get to that; that is one of the quotes I am coming to, but I will start with the quotes from 11 March 2021 at the Liberal Party’s WA costing press conference. According to my notes, the member for Cottesloe said —

“Andrew Hastie can say what he likes, I’m the person who’s looked at this policy in detail.

“You know, I’m the person that’s proud to stand behind a policy, that is properly costed out that is going to attract jobs for 10s of thousands of Western Australians because it’s Government showing leadership.

“On my polling booth, I can tell you I’ve had dozens and dozens of people come to me and say this is a fantastic policy.

That is the member for Cottesloe. The member for Cottesloe had that debate on 16 February.

Ms J.J. Shaw: The debacle!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The debacle on 16 April, at the Australian Institute of Energy. According to my notes, the member for Cottesloe said —

“We believe coal fired power stations should be shut down.

That is exactly what he said. What else did he say? He said that Muja C and D would close in 2022 and 2024. He wanted Muja D closed in 2024. That is a specific quote from him. Interestingly, he was asked this question by Dan Mercer from the ABC. According to my notes, he was asked —

Will you commit to this policy if it brings you into conflict with the Prime Minister and the Federal Liberal Government?

Remember that at that time, Scott Morrison was the Prime Minister of Australia. The member for Cottesloe answered —

“Absolutely, we’re a broad church in the Liberal party and we know there’s a wide debate on this, but we believe that this is the policy that is right for Western Australia.”

That is what he said at the time. He has a choice here: Was the member being dishonest to the people of Western Australia then, or is he not telling the truth now? Which is the truth? Is he saying that we cannot close the coal-fired power stations in an orderly way over the next seven years, or do they all have to be closed three years from today? He cannot walk both sides of the street. The problem with the member for Cottesloe is he forgets that I remember. I remember exactly what he said.

Ms J.J. Shaw: You know where all the skeletons are buried.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Some of them are not buried; some of them are just skeletons.

It is very difficult to run the system here in Western Australia, but I just want to go through a few of the things that have changed since I became the minister. I was appointed on 13 December 2018. Eight days later, we signed up Bright Energy Investments. That is the device that allows us to add additional wind farms here in Western Australia through a contractual arrangement involving Synergy. The Warradarge wind farm is now the second largest wind farm in Western Australia, but at that time it was the largest. On 6 March 2019, I launched the energy transformation strategy.

On 24 April 2019, with the Premier’s support, we introduced advanced metering infrastructure, which I spoke about in question time today. It is revolutionising the way we manage not the transmission network but the distribution network; previously, there had been no transparency in the way it operated.

We kicked off the centralised solar power for remote communities strategy on 9 May 2019. This was a very important step forward in providing reliable power for people in remote Aboriginal communities, who, up till that stage, had had the least reliability, and were the most disadvantaged, of any electricity consumers in the state. On 9 May 2019, the same day, we kicked off the consumer advocacy project, because up until then, there had not been a consumer voice in the policy debate in Western Australia. We created a unit within Energy Policy WA that focuses on residential consumers. We provide grant funding to non-government organisations and others to do research to examine the needs of the consumer side and we have created a consumer forum so that the voices of residential consumers can be heard inside the policy development process. We appointed Stephen Edwell as the Energy Transformation Taskforce chair on 20 May 2019.

On 19 June 2019, with the Minister for Education and Training, we started training for the Western Power workforce to start dealing with standalone power systems so that linesmen will have a career path even if we move further into standalone power systems. On 5 August 2019, the Premier and I visited the workforce and spoke to the workers at Muja C and announced the closure of Muja C power station. We gave three years' notice of the closure of the first unit and five years' notice of the second closure. It is a long period so that all the issues can be dealt with before the plant is closed.

With the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, on 9 December 2019, I launched family and domestic violence assistance for customers of Synergy and Horizon Power. People suffering from family and domestic violence can have assistance to get away from any sexually transmitted debt that they might have from a violent partner. That was an important step forward to assist people in very difficult circumstances.

On 10 February 2020, we launched the community batteries trial to see whether we could make a difference and improve reliability by using community batteries in the electricity system.

On 2 April 2020, the Electricity Industry Amendment Bill 2019 passed Parliament. That legislation will allow for standalone power systems to be part of the regulated asset base for Western Power and for the creation of the north west interconnected system with a separated regulatory environment so that we can get lower cost electricity for industry in the Pilbara. On 4 April 2020, we launched the *Distributed energy resources roadmap*, which came out of the energy transformation strategy.

On 4 August 2020, the Minister for Education and Training and I launched the schools virtual power plant project, which unlocks the benefit of renewable energy for schools in a way that reinforces the network, making it more reliable. Of course, the first school was in Kalgoorlie. We continue to roll out that program.

Mr D.A.E. Scaife: I'm very proud to have one in Success Primary School as well, minister.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Excellent.

On 13 August 2020, we started a grants program for NGOs working with the most disadvantaged people in Western Australia.

On 31 August 2020, we introduced the distributive energy buyback scheme, which was a revolutionary process to undo the previous renewable energy buyback scheme. The REBS had had its day and was no longer relevant. This allows for differential prices for the feed-in of electricity from consumers. If you have a battery and feed electricity into the system at peak times, you get rewarded more than if you simply feed it in during the middle of the day when we are well supplied with rooftop solar. On the east coast, they are charging people to export solar. We are not doing that. We are saying that we want rooftop solar to be part of this revolution. It is an extraordinary revolution that is changing everything about the electricity system. This incentivised investment by individual home owners supports reliability in the grid. Is that not a better outcome than on the east coast, which I suppose is what the shadow minister wants, where governments are charging people to export their electricity?

On 11 September 2020, the Minister for Education and Training and I launched the solar schools program for schools on the Horizon footprint.

On 2 October 2020, the Premier, the member for Kwinana and I announced the Synergy big battery. It is the first large battery in Western Australia, which is an important first step down the firming pathway because, as we know, we need firm renewables, not just renewables.

Two days later, on 4 October 2020, the Premier and I launched the \$600 rebate that cut the cost of electricity for all consumers in Western Australia, a policy opposed by the member for Cottesloe.

On 12 October, on behalf of the energy transformation strategy, we launched the whole-of-system plan. In his contribution, the member for Cottesloe asked what we are doing about transmission infrastructure assessment. That is part of our \$3.8 billion plan to replace the coal-fired power stations, but the other thing is that we know we can build the replacement for the Collie coal-fired power stations by using the existing infrastructure. Instead of having to go out and build more infrastructure, which is what the opposition's plan was, we can get value out of the public sector's existing investment in infrastructure.

On 27 November 2020, we announced that Horizon Power was going to build the world's first hydrogen microgrid at Denham. It is now engineering complete and we are looking forward to it being ready for full implementation.

On 7 December 2020, the then Minister for Housing and I announced the smart energy for social housing policy—a revolutionary process. People often ask me why we do not subsidise solar panels and batteries. I tell them that we do but only for the most disadvantaged people—the people who cannot afford to get involved in this energy infrastructure revolution. We are rolling out innovative technology for social housing that is making a real difference for the most disadvantaged people in Western Australia. The people with the biggest problems are getting the most help. I cannot understand why the Liberal Party criticised us for that.

On 16 December, we started the Midday Saver trial, which comes out of the DER road map. This is another innovative project that allows people to take advantage of the solar revolution and save money. We are waiting for a few issues to be resolved, but about 40 000 residential consumers in the south west system have volunteered to go on to other tariffs, not the A1 tariff. We want to give those people an opportunity to move to a tariff that responds to the needs of a high renewable energy, high distributed energy system. The Midday Saver trial is the basis of the work we are doing there.

On 29 December 2020, we reintroduced the household energy efficiency scheme—HEES—which had been stopped by the former Liberal government. This is an innovative project based on research from around the world that shows that if we help low-income earners to use energy more efficiently, and therefore use less electricity, their cost of electricity goes down. Many low-income earners cannot afford more efficient equipment in their homes—for example, fridges. Because fridges are on 24/7, inefficient fridges drive up electricity prices, just as an example. There are also other things that people can do in their home to save money. The household energy efficiency scheme works with low-income earners through non-government organisations in partnership with Synergy and Horizon Power to help people act more efficiently in the operation of electrical appliances in their homes to drive down their electricity bills. Why did the Liberal Party close that scheme when it was last in government? I am sure the fact that the member for Bassendean's wife was the executive officer of the non-government organisation doing that project had nothing to do with it. Rachael Roberts was the executive officer of the NGO that provided that service. I bet members that I know why that happened.

On 22 January 2021, we announced that energy sector reforms would start on 1 July 2021—the largest change in the regulatory framework in Western Australia since the reforms of 2005. It is the biggest advance in the regulatory framework so that we can respond to the new technologies that are changing the way everything works.

On 28 January, we announced the rollout of the standalone power systems that would be part of business as usual for both Horizon Power and Western Power. This was welcomed by people in the wheatbelt because it will improve the performance and reliability of their electricity supply. This could not be done prior to the passage of the energy sector reforms that I mentioned before. Only the Labor government was determined to do that because we knew that the standalone power systems that use new technology and are often built here in Western Australia are a new opportunity to improve the performance for consumers in the wheatbelt. Our aim is to roll out 4 000 of those over the next four years, which will be a direct improvement in the energy experience for many people living in the wheatbelt.

On 3 February 2021, we announced Project Symphony, a world-leading project that brings together Synergy, Western Power and the Australian Energy Market Operator to test the coordination of energy equipment in 500 consumer properties in the south-eastern suburbs of Perth. The future of electricity is in coordinating the investments of others to make a better system.

On 2 February 2021, Horizon Power entered into the Boundary Power co-investment, in which the government of Western Australia has a 50 per cent share in the manufacture of standalone power systems. We are investing in manufacturing here in Western Australia, using the balance sheet of the government of Western Australia in a joint venture that will not only provide for these innovative, new technologies to be rolled out in the wheatbelt to improve the performance that members opposite have complained about at various times, but also improve the electricity experience of wheatbelt consumers. We are harvesting the investment to create jobs for Western Australians in manufacturing, supported by the government's 50 per cent ownership.

On 18 June 2021, we were able to announce the success of the Onslow microgrid. It was the first occasion anywhere in the world on which a microgrid used 100 per cent of energy from only rooftop solar. Members opposite have no idea how difficult that was. I thank the people of Onslow for being so patient while we worked out the kinks in that project. The software provider, which is an American company, is using the Onslow microgrid to market its technology around the world. As a result of COVID, it was not able to bring its customers here, but it is desperate to bring its customers to Onslow. Would the member believe that it wants to go to Onslow because it has the world's leading jurisdiction —

Dr D.J. Honey: It's a beautiful place.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, it is, but I bet that many people in North America and Europe have never heard of Onslow. Now people will go to Onslow to see the world's best distributed energy resources technology in place, which is run by Horizon. We are now able to use that technology to roll out to more locations, which means more microgrids for Horizon so that we can get the best out of rooftop solar. Again, I do not understand why the Liberal Party opposes all this stuff.

On 1 July 2021, the reforms in the north west interconnected system commenced. Again, it is the first step in a revolution. We have been talking about an integrated grid in the Pilbara for more than 30 years, and this is the first step in that process. I will talk about that a bit more in a moment.

On 5 August 2021, Horizon Power returned its call centre to Broome from Melbourne, where it had been placed by the former Liberal–National government, and of the 11 initial employees, I think eight were Aboriginal, seven of whom had never had a job. Again, we are using the power of Western Australia's government to create jobs in regional Western Australia. Is it not good that some of those jobs were for Aboriginal people? Aboriginal people in the Kimberley are some of the most disadvantaged in the state and we are providing opportunities for them.

On 17 August 2021, the Minister for Transport, the then Minister for Environment and I announced the electric vehicle charging network.

On 2 February 2022, the Kalbarri microgrid was in full operation. It is a \$13.5 million investment in innovative technology to improve regional reliability. The other thing, of course, is proving up the technology. There is no point rolling out technology if we do not know whether it is going to work—now we know. We are learning how to run that microgrid, which is a connected, not disconnected, microgrid, which is a very important point. If we can, we do not want to disconnect from the network, because that means that we can provide better reliability—not 100 per cent reliability—for Kalbarri, where it has always been a challenge to provide reliable electricity. It improves that reliability.

On 21 April this year, we launched the Pumped-up Walpole project, which, again, is about innovation and new ways of doing things with new technology. I understand that the Liberal Party does not like it, but it will use renewable energy to provide better outcomes for the people of Walpole. Again, I make the point that this is such a good project that will support the Walpole community if there is an outage on the line before it reaches Walpole. It will work best because of the multiple funding sources. When it is completed, Pumped-up Walpole will be a registered participant in the market and, therefore, it will get not only capacity payments and energy payments, but also non-cooptimised essential system services payments from Western Power, which will make the project more valuable. The developers believe that the project can be replicated at a range of locations across the south west. When we prove that it can work properly, that new technology will be available to us. Again, Western Power is to be congratulated for that innovative process of improving reliability for a community in the south west.

On 6 May this year, we announced our renewable hydrogen target, which, again, is world-leading innovation. We are currently consulting industry about how we will roll out that renewable hydrogen target, but the plan is to have one per cent of the electricity in the south west interconnected system supplied by hydrogen, which will be about 16 tonnes a day of demand to support a couple of these early stage projects. It will give demand for the early stage projects that might otherwise not reach investment closure. It will also support a renewable alternative for firming—I get back to that, member for Swan Hills! What do we need? We need firmed renewables, which is exactly what that project is designed to do.

On 14 June this year, we announced the coal closures in Collie, but we also announced a \$3.8 billion investment in new infrastructure to replace that. We have explained this dozens of times. I understand the member for Cottesloe does not listen, but I will explain it again. We will have 810 megawatts from new-build wind farms. That is the principal energy source that will support the retirement of the existing capacity of the coal-fired power stations. I make the point that 810 megawatts is more than the capacity of the retiring plant, because wind farms are not always available; they cannot always provide electricity. But that is also supported by the already created 1 800 megawatts of rooftop solar, which is going up by over 200 megawatts a year. Therefore, by the time we get to 2029, we will probably have 3 200 megawatts of capacity from solar in the south west interconnected system to add to the 810 megawatts of power that we are creating from the new-build wind farms. I understand that the member for Cottesloe does not understand these things—I know that—but this idea that we are not being transparent and explaining what we are doing is just ridiculous. The member asked which wind farms we will be doing. We have already said that Warradarge stage 2 is one, because that is an existing co-investment and we can easily roll it out, but otherwise we will go to market and ask people what projects we should buy.

Ms J.J. Shaw: Perhaps they have lost their faith in markets!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I do not know; maybe they have. It could be hard. The idea that we would say in advance that we will commit to a specific wind farm is silly. That would push up the costs. Why does the member not think that the interests of taxpayers are important? We do not want to leave ourselves with no alternatives.

We have also said that we want to build 4 400 megawatt hours—1 100 megawatts of capacity—storage. We have made it clear we are going to have a lot of lithium ion batteries. As I have already said, part of that will be stage 2 of the Kwinana big battery, and we have a range of other projects we are working on. One problem we have at the moment is that there is a worldwide shortage of batteries and we might have to pre-order some batteries before we have a site. One of the interesting things is that one site could be Collie, because it already has the power infrastructure.

We have talked about another element of storage—that is, pumped hydro. Again, I have been 100 per cent transparent on this. Western Australia's south west interconnected system has everything that is needed for pumped hydro, except for mountains and water! It is okay for Queensland, because it has mountains and water, but we do not, so it is a lot more difficult here. We do not know, standing here today, whether it is technically possible to execute the project that we want to execute. Lots of people are telling me it is, including private sector investors. All these people have different ideas, including using the mine voids and the waste dumps of the coalmines. I am not an engineer. I do not know whether that is technically feasible, but guess what? Synergy is engaging with engineers to examine whether that is possible; indeed, so are the coal companies.

Ms J.J. Shaw: Maybe they should ask Paul Murray because he's an expert!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, maybe the opposition should ask him for his expert opinion, not the member for Cottesloe!

I make the point that if that is technically feasible, it will be a great solution because it will eliminate the need to rehabilitate the mine voids and the waste dumps. If it is possible, that will be a great outcome, but it might not be possible. I am not an engineer. There are alternatives using other locations, but, of course, those other locations have increased environmental risks. That is why we are allowing ourselves two years to do the detailed site selection process. After we do the detailed site selection process, we are then allowing two years to deal with the engineering and the environmental issues. That then gives us three years to finish the build of the project. That is a commonsense process. If at any stage along that pathway in the next four years it is proven that, technically, it will not be able to be executed, we can immediately pin it back to do lithium ion batteries because they are understood and known technologies. We do not have a technology risk in this matter.

Of course, other people are coming forward with alternatives to pumped hydro. Some of those are speculative projects. We are unlikely to take engineering risks, but some others are engineering solutions that have been executed and proved elsewhere in the world. If it is an option, we will look at it. We are not excluding any option. I can tell members that it will almost certainly be executed near Collie, because that is where the infrastructure is. If we go to another location, we will push up our costs. That is why the idea to build 1 000 kilometres north of Geraldton is so silly. It would require so much infrastructure that it would be crazy, member for Cottesloe.

On 1 July this year, we also provided a \$400 energy rebate. The price of electricity this year is lower than it was last year. Unlike the Liberal Party, which doubled the price of electricity in its eight years in office, the McGowan government has not done that. When we came to government, the forward estimates included a seven per cent increase in electricity prices. That was back in 2017. That was the Liberal Party's plan—seven per cent, seven per cent, seven per cent! It would have crippled Western Australians. We rejected that. We have not done it and we are not going to do it. In Western Australia, the underlying increase in the electricity price is 2.5 per cent compared with 30 per cent on the east coast. Indeed, if anybody looked at the recent Australian Financial Review Energy and Climate Summit, they would have seen that all the large energy players on the east coast said that the 30 per cent increase this year was only the start and they expect a 30 per cent increase again next year. Western Australia is the only place in the world with stable electricity prices—the only place in the world! It is good that it is stable for residential consumers, but it is also stable for industrial users, which is why so many industrial users are looking at Western Australia. We do not have the problems of the east coast. We have carefully managed the system.

In the last nine minutes, I will address this question of outages through mechanical failure of the distribution network. In the end, consumers do not care why the power goes out; they just do not want the power to go out. I understand that. The idea that Western Power is not investing in the network is ridiculous. The member for Cottesloe always misquotes the Shepherd inquiry. He reads up to a comma, but not after it. After the comma, Michelle Shepherd pointed out that Western Power spent everything it was asked to spend. No project was ever rejected by government; there was no project that Western Power could not execute because of the Economic Regulation Authority. Western Power did everything it was asked to do. What is more, it moved money around for different aspects of its investments. It is true that in one category of expenditure, it did move expenditure to another category.

Members should not forget the other thing that Michelle Shepherd found—not a single outage at Christmas was caused by a lack of maintenance. That is something the member for Cottesloe never repeats. He never says that it was found, as a matter of fact, that the outages at Christmas were caused by planning issues or a breakdown of the mechanical structure of the electricity system.

I want to address this question of the planning basis. Some people think planning is that on 10 December we decide what occurs on 25 December. No, that is not the case. It is the planning criteria for what will happen in two or

three years' time. There were a couple of locations, including in the member for Dawesville's community, where the demand for electricity went up faster than in the planning criteria. That was unfortunate and it did lead to outages, which is why Western Power is investing in the necessary infrastructure at that location. It was not that people at Western Power woke up on 20 December and had not prepared for 25 December. In fact, if members read Michelle Shepherd's report, she details how Western Power set up an emergency management team and how it worked over Christmas. Western Power recalled workers from their Christmas holidays so that it would have the resources available that were needed. Exactly what occurred in each of the specific outages is explained in a completely open and transparent way. Of course, if someone is without power for two days, they do not really care about that. I understand that, but this idea that somehow it was because of a lack of investment or maintenance is clearly not true.

It is very difficult to manage the south west interconnected system. It is a very complicated machine. It has literally millions of moving parts, and each of those parts plays an important role in the entire system. Think about it as a big machine; that is the way we have to look at it. Less than 60 per cent of flights are taking off on time at the moment. If we had that in the electricity system, we would be out of power for months at a time. It is never convenient and we are trying to do better, but let us be honest with the people of Western Australia about the causes.

The other problem is the idea of country versus city. That behaviour is really appalling. It is simply a fact—it was true when those opposite were in government and it is true today—that it is harder to provide electricity in regional Western Australia.

Ms J.J. Shaw: And much more expensive.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is much more expensive. Again, I urge everybody to read the Economics and Industry Standing Committee's eighth report of the last Parliament. It is a great report. It has a chart that shows the cost of service for Western Power in the south west interconnected system. It is 24 times more expensive to provide power in the wheatbelt than it is in the metropolitan area. We are happy to make that investment. We are happy that the consumers of electricity in Cannington are paying to subsidise the consumers of electricity in the member for Moore's seat and the member for Roe's seat. We are proud of that, which is why we are so disappointed by the member for Roe and the member for Moore accusing consumers in Cannington of not caring. It is really disappointing, and it does not do the members any credit.

The benchmarks for supply reliability in regional Western Australia have always been different from the benchmarks in the metro area. The people of Horrocks and the areas north and south of Geraldton have suffered in that way, which is one of the reasons why I have asked Western Power to make those extra investments there. The average hides the individual performance. One of Michelle Shepherd's recommendations was that there be more transparency about individual feeders rather than focusing on averages—again, a great comment. That is why we are making extra investments into that area. Apart from remote Aboriginal communities, that is the hardest part of the state to provide reliable power to, because of the environmental circumstance in that location. It is a great place to live, but it is harder on the electrical infrastructure. We are making those investments.

I have been to Quairading and talked to the people there. We have a theoretical proposal to work through with Western Power and Synergy to do some work in Quairading. We have engaged with the North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils. We are doing all these things. We want to do better. We want to use these new technologies that the Liberal Party and the National Party are so opposed to and provide better outcomes for their constituents. Four thousand standalone power systems over the next four years—who else is doing it? We are the ones doing it. We expect between 6 000 and 10 000 over the next decade. Each of those will mean families in the wheatbelt get a better electricity supply, thanks to the Labor government. We are proud of that. It is not surprising, because we have so many voters who support us in these places, but, even if people do not vote for us, we are still just as determined to provide better outcomes. That is what we are trying to do. Sometimes we will slip up. Sometimes we will get it wrong, but what people have to understand is that we are trying to do the best we can.

The thing I want to finish on is the question of the bushfire responses. It is very complicated because Western Power does not want to burn places down. The member for Roe has raised questions with me about a fire that, potentially, was started by Western Power infrastructure. There is no easy answer to this bushfire stuff. What did we do? We did exactly what Michelle Shepherd recommended. We hired an independent consultant who is a specialist in the area. That consultant is working with Western Power and local governments across the wheatbelt to examine the criteria for the restoration of power on high fire danger days, and we are engaging with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services as part of that process. There are no easy answers here. If we do automatically restart an energy network and it causes a fire, that is suboptimal. It could cause millions of dollars of damage, even lives lost. We have to try to do our best here. These are all important issues.

The thing that the people of the wheatbelt should understand is that we are determined to do better. If people want me to come and visit them, I am happy to do so. I have been to areas north and south of Geraldton. I have been to the wheatbelt. I have been to Esperance. I go to Kalgoorlie. I understand the frustration people have. I am happy

to front up and have the conversation. I have told Western Power it has to do better on communication, because clearly it has not been doing well up to now. But do not accuse us of not caring. That is just dishonest politics. It should not be a matter of “city good, country bad” or the other way around. We are all in this together. We are trying to do the best we can. It is very important to us.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [5.55 pm]: I certainly want to support the motion from the member for Cottesloe that this house condemns the McGowan Labor government and its Minister for Energy for the ongoing mismanagement of our state’s energy network, which is stifling regional and state development and has left Western Australian households and businesses vulnerable to blackouts. To be honest, I was hoping that the Minister for Energy would have reserved his comments until a little bit later on in this debate. I have some genuine questions, and I was hoping he might be able to answer them. Once again, he has jumped up straight after the first speaker, and we do not have the opportunity to ask him those questions. I will ask them anyway, but I will not get a response. No doubt he will pack up and be gone.

The events of today have provided some sort of breakthrough. This opposition has been questioning, time after time. We have had phone calls from solar providers, electricians, farmers and small businesses. I have had phone calls from electricians in Jerramungup, farmers in Lake Grace, energy providers in Katanning, other energy providers and solar operators in Denmark and in any number of other places. They call to ask about the new circuit breaker rules, which seem to have been brought in in February 2022. The minister says, “These aren’t new rules; we’re just applying the old rules”, but he has not taken the time to put out some communication about why this has just popped up out of nowhere.

This government purports to be the government of renewables: “We’re the government of solar and the government of wind farms, but, for anyone who is outside of the city or a large regional city like Albany, Bunbury or Geraldton, we will restrict them to the 32-kilovolt ampere circuit breakers.” The supply of power to regional households will be restricted to half of that in the city. The minister says, “It’s not right. You’re pitting the city against the country.” Well, country people feel like they are second-class citizens. We have a minister who is meant to be responsible for work health and safety, but he has put in place rules that do not allow people to upgrade their shearing shed power. They cannot run the shearing plants and the wool press at the same time, because one of them will cut out. Farmers will not be able to upgrade the power to their shearing sheds, their workshops, their welders and the like; they are too frightened it will cut out.

I wanted to ask the minister about the trial. After many questions from the opposition in this place, I am pleased to see that the trial is going to happen and that pressure has been applied to Western Power. I am looking forward to the trial and the subsequent implementation. I want to ask the minister about the implementation timetable. At the moment, solar providers in the regions cannot install solar panels on rooftops, even though they have promised their customers and clients throughout these regional towns over the last few months that they would, because they have to upgrade the switchboard. The trial will apparently finish in March 2023. Will we just be getting some preliminary results by then? I want to ask the Minister for Energy when the results of the trial will be implemented. When will the solar providers throughout the great southern, the wheatbelt and the midwest be able to rely on the fact that this 63-amp power scenario will be applied to their customers’ properties, as it is in Perth and the larger regional cities? This has been a frustration for several months now. As I said, I have received a massive number of phone calls, including from people in Facebook groups and electricians—the list goes on. Members should imagine being in a household in which the kettle uses 10 amps and the air conditioner uses a similar amount, then they throw the toaster on as well and all of a sudden the power kicks out. That is the scenario told to us by any number of these providers and electricians. As far as I am concerned, we welcome the announcement today. As I said, the incessant questioning from the opposition has brought about this trial. We have responded to our regional businesses, our electricians and our farmers because of a frustration that I have never before seen the likes of. It is quite bizarre for the government to say that it is the government of renewables and that it supports electric vehicles and the like, but it does not put in the infrastructure that will support those items because the switchboard has to change. The government will not supply as much power to these customers because it has to change the switchboard. Until question time today, we had absolutely no relief on the horizon.

Those were the questions, member for Cottesloe, that I wanted the Minister for Energy to answer. He seems to have packed his bags and departed the scene. We know that the trial will happen. It will be another six to eight months before that is finished. The next questions are: What will be the results of the trial? How long will it be until the implementation phase? How many towns and regions will that implementation phase cover? Will it take a staged approach with only several towns a year being covered and will we still be here in seven or eight years’ time asking for a 63-amp power supply? As I said, the minister seems to have departed the scene. I will have to arrange another meeting because I have a lot of questions that need to be answered.

I would now like to briefly move on to Hon Darren West. It was interesting to see a post by Hon Darren West on his Facebook page on 26 September in which he said that the power network is over 99 per cent reliable. Once again, member for Cottesloe, we are going to see the need for both the Premier and the Minister for Energy to put a lid

on the social media activities of Hon Darren West. In the *Annual reliability and power quality report for the year ended 30 June 2022*, the number of interruptions exceeding the permitted number of times for urban areas went up from 1 323 customers who had been interrupted more than nine times in 2020–21 to 4 364 in the last financial year. On top of that, the number of “other area” customers who had been interrupted more than 16 times went from 623 customers in 2020–21 to 5 558 customers in 2021–22. The number of customer complaints went from 1 517 in 2020–21 to 1 959 in 2021–22. Although the figures in the report say there was a 99 per cent average availability of power to customer premises, I wonder whether the following examples of power outages in this report would placate those customers who were affected. A total of 2 195 customers were without power for 26 hours, 2 271 customers were without power for 25 hours, 33 customers were without power for 43 hours, four customers were without power for 101 hours, one customer was without power for eight days, 127 customers were without power for 18 days and 69 customers were without power for 16 days.

Earlier, I was interested to hear the member for Cottesloe give the Economic Regulation Authority figures. In Perth in 2021, there were over a million power outages. In rural areas, the average has been 16 outages a year. When this government laughs and carries on when we bring up the fact that some of our regional people are treated as second-class citizens, it should take a look over the Darling scarp and see what is going on.

Dr A.D. Buti: The old Terry Redman trick.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member for Armadale lives close to the Darling scarp.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Minister for Finance!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I look forward to the member going over the range and coming out.

There are no two ways about it. We know that there are weather events, but for Hon Darren West to say there is 99 per cent reliability seems to contradict the personal cost when the power goes out. I want to talk about the personal cost. We saw how the fires in Wickepin and Narrogin this year flowed on to Bruce Rock and Corrigin. The personal cost to those farmers was quite disturbing. The member for Cottesloe, who is the Leader of the Liberal Party; the Leader of the Opposition; Hon Martin Aldridge; and I went there to check out things. We went to the place between Narrogin and Wickepin where that fire started. I have heard the minister say that none of these issues are related to maintenance, but when these wires sag because the poles are too far apart and the sparks that are created from those wires touching start a fire, that is a maintenance issue. The personal cost to those farmers it is very hard to describe. When a farmer has not only lost several hundred of their breeding sheep, but also has to destroy and bury them, the toll is hard to describe. On that day we visited, some of those farmers were only just coming to grips with it because it had not happened that long ago. Losing those sheep and those pigs —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right. It is not just about losing the stock, but also the recovery phase. It is about having to agist the sheep to Hyden or somewhere else because there are no fences left. Some farmers had lost 30 to 60 kilometres of fencing. For them to come to grips with all that because of something that has happened through no fault of their own causes so much mental anguish, I cannot even imagine it. Once again, we have some big crops out there this year, so there will be another massive fire load. Our power grid is the lifeline of the state, and while power is delivered by overhead lines that are not always maintained in the proper fashion and while we are subject to pole-top fires, which frequently happen throughout the wheatbelt, we will have issues. We will also have potential issues for the farming community and communities in general. I want to compliment the communities of Narrogin, Wickepin, Corrigin and Bruce Rock that supported those farmers during the grief that they had. Hon Steve Martin, in the other place, has been asking the Minister for Energy, through his questions on notice, when the report will come out. On the weekend, I was at a tennis tournament in my electorate and that was the first question asked of me by one of the farmers who had been affected by the fires: when is the report coming out? These farmers want some closure. They want to know exactly what happened. The Minister for Energy mentioned a minute ago that he has consultants and so on working on it. All I can do is urge him to get on to it and get that report out as soon as possible. The pattern that seems to have developed over time is that we wait for the report, but the report on the Toodyay fire just took too long, and these people need closure.

I want to mention a couple of other things before wrapping up today. Last Friday, I was at the Esperance Show. The government had come in and closed down the gas pipeline from Kambalda, meaning everyone had to switch everything over to electric appliances. The first person to come up to me said, “I heard something from someone about six months ago. I am worried about the appliances. I have not seen an electrician.” In Esperance, we have about 400 customers—120-odd are in public housing—who need to know how the switch is going. They need to get some more activity, and, once again, there is a problem with getting tradesmen. This minister needs to follow-up on that.

When I think about Hon Darren West's "99 per cent reliable" scenario and towns like Ravensthorpe, the only thing that people there can rely on is a 99 per cent chance that the power will go out on many days right throughout the summer.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is the 99 per cent we can rely on. When we have a place like Ravensthorpe at the end of the line, that is what we can rely on. We saw the Christmas blackouts in Kalgoorlie. We saw the situation in Quairading, Morawa and many other towns up through the member for Moore's electorate, and, the question is: why should everyone get a generator? Why should they? I know it is more expensive to provide power in the regional areas—we all know that. I know that it costs more money to supply water and power, but I also know that with some of the resources coming out of the member for North West Central's electorate, around about 60 to 70 per cent of the state's income comes out of the regions, but this seems to be conveniently forgotten when the likes of the Minister for Energy talks about it costing the government twice as much. Where does all the income for the state come from? It comes from the regions.

Another thing that I want to mention is that I was talking to a doctor in Geraldton the other weekend, and he said that when the power goes out and they have to go back to using generators, there is chaos and anarchy after 72 hours. He had seen examples of that in his town of Geraldton. The case was that three days was about the limit and then people were down at the fuel station arguing with each other over the supply of fuel for their generators. That is how long we have until the wheels come off. That is why people get upset about the constant outages happening in our regional areas. The Esperance fires was a perfect example of power outages and when the restricted backup energy supply from our batteries for our mobile towers was found wanting. Communications is another element that the state government needs to work on with Telstra and other providers. As the member for Cottesloe said, people in the regions rely on their mobile phones for communication and when there is a fire and you cannot see 10 metres in front of you, communication is more important than ever. It is the same scenario with water supplies, water pumps and the like. But I just wanted to point out the story; after three days or 72 hours is when we start getting chaos out there in the communities.

In wrapping up, I want to say that I am disappointed that the minister has departed the scene straight after his contribution today because I have genuine questions. But I want to congratulate other members of the opposition, and members in the Legislative Council, for their questioning of the Minister for Energy about the changes in Western Power regulations that limit households to 32-kilovolt ampere units and restrict the uptake and installation of renewable energy. I wanted to ask the minister about the implementation of renewable energy after his trial and about the Narrogin fire report and the like. It is quite disappointing that he has departed the scene, but no doubt I will talk to him again. As I said, I do want to congratulate the members of the opposition who have consistently stood up for our regional clients, small businesses and solar providers, who, quite frankly, have been left high and dry by this government. I want to congratulate our electricians who have not been able to install the solar solutions because of the upgrades to the switchboard, which were totally unrealistic, our farmers who have not been able to upgrade their shearing shed circuit boards, and the many other small businesses that have been affected. I want some implementation time lines from this minister so those economic providers and consumers know where they are going in the future.

MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston) [6.18 pm]: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the motion tonight. I would like to say that I absolutely disagree with the opposition condemning the McGowan government and the Minister for Energy for the mismanagement of the state's energy network. I am standing here as the member for Collie–Preston, and as many people in the chamber and my community know, I am extremely passionate about what happens to the energy system. I am passionate about the members of my community, the broader south west community and those people who live and work around Collie–Preston and rely on the energy system for not only their homes and businesses, but also their primary place of employment.

As many members are aware, my husband is a Synergy employee. His role is as a power station operator at Muja power station, and he was at work the day the first closure happened, which was unit 5 in late September this year. He and his colleagues work incredibly closely with the Australian Energy Market Regulator, and I was interested to hear the minister respond to the questions from the member for Cottesloe about AEMO. I was really interested to hear the comments from the Australian Energy Market Regulator about the fact that by coming up with this very detailed, specialised and stepped-out plan for phasing out coal-fired power stations as government assets by 2029, the McGowan Labor government and the Minister for Energy have created certainty in the system. That is the reverse of what the member for Cottesloe is saying. AEMO, the national operator, is actually saying that we are doing this the right way. I think AEMO is the expert in this matter. It also said that the government's initiative would give certainty to the communities of Collie and surrounding areas as a flow-on effect. I certainly back those comments. This government understands the importance of getting the energy system right whilst protecting jobs.

As I said earlier, my husband works at Muja power station, and a lot of those coal-fired power stations were built around 50 years ago. I think Collie power station is the newest. The Muja assets were designed to run as baseload power; they were not designed to be able to fluctuate up and down. That has changed because of the massive increase in rooftop solar uptake by the people of Western Australia. If I was asked to do a straw poll of the chamber and get everyone to put their hand up to indicate whether they have rooftop solar, I am pretty sure that most of us would indicate that we have. Rooftop solar energy is attractive to people because it helps lower our energy costs, but helping the mums and dads and people living across Western Australia lower their energy costs has created issues within the system. This government is doing more than any other government in the history of Western Australia to try to balance those challenges. We are not only trying to look after the system; we are trying to make sure that we have reliable power going forward. We are certainly trying to look after the people who will be impacted—the community of Collie and the wider Collie–Preston area—when those changes are implemented. When the coal-fired power stations close down, we also want to counter the social costs on the system.

Another thing that is incredibly important to this government is the universal tariff system. The member for Cottesloe claimed that the Minister for Energy does not support the regions. The universal tariff system is the number one factor that negates that idea and that argument from the member for Cottesloe. The fact is that when a person connects their power in Karratha, Collie, Geraldton, Onslow or in any regional town, that connection is subsidised by metropolitan consumers and customers. That means it is the fairest system we could possibly come up with. I know that the opposition was very keen a few years ago to privatise Western Power. If we had done that, the universal tariff system almost certainly would have gone out the door, because private companies only want to make a profit.

Mr K.J.J. Michel: The member for North West Central also knows that.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Correct.

Private companies are driven by profits. The universal tariff system ensures that everyone is looked after and has access to affordable electricity connection. As I said, the sale of Western Power would almost have guaranteed that the tariff arrangement would be gone. That is something that the opposition had as its platform leading into the 2017 election, and we know how well that went for it.

In my opinion, the biggest threat to the power system is the Liberal Party and the opposition. The Minister for Energy went through the opposition's energy policy very eloquently today, so I will not run members back through that, but I do want to remind members that a Liberal member for the South West Region in the other place, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, referred to it in a Liberal Party press release as the stupidest policy he had ever seen. That is the opposition's own colleagues criticising its own policy, yet members opposite stand here today and criticise a policy that very clearly looks after not only the energy system, but also consumers in Western Australia and the people of my community.

I am quite staggered to think about what the opposition's alternative was, because I very clearly remember standing on the steps of the Collie Mine Workers Institute with about 150 impacted workers on the morning that the Liberal Party announced that its policy going into the 2021 election would be to close all coal-fired power stations by 2025, and locate those jobs in the midwest. That is where the opposition was going to put the new infrastructure. The minister today very clearly indicated that there is already a huge array of infrastructure in Collie, which means that in respect of the transmission costs of new energy, we will be able to take advantage of existing infrastructure and not have to build any new infrastructure. Having said that, this government has invested \$3.8 billion into new infrastructure to make sure that our energy system is very reliable going forward.

The minister made no apologies about the fact that our energy system cannot be 100 per cent reliable. In fact, if anything in life was 100 per cent reliable, I would go and put \$20 on black at the casino right now! It is not a gamble, but there are no certainties to anything in life. This system that we have created and that continues to evolve and change as the energy system changes is all we can do to ensure that our communities are looked after going forward.

When the opposition said in the 2021 election campaign that it would close all the coal-fired power stations by 2025, it was rejected wholeheartedly by the community of Collie, the greater south west and, in fact, right across Western Australia. I would like to highlight the fact that this government's plan for the transition of energy really looks after my community. We have a staged and very well thought out approach, to making sure that the community has the opportunity to transition out of coal-fired power stations and, therefore, the work that relies on that. We have, as I said, very well planned transition and power station retirement dates that will take us through to 2029—not 2025, as was planned by the opposition.

I have a couple of examples of some of the things that the opposition has been saying recently in our local paper, the *Collie River Valley Bulletin*. I would really like this to be in *Hansard* so that my community will understand how passionate I am about being part of this government and about the changes that inevitably will happen. I want to point out a couple of things before I read this. Firstly, both coalmines are owned by private companies. Something

that needs to be highlighted right now is that Griffin Coal going into receivership is one of the reasons it is so important for the government to plan for the future and to transition away from its reliance on coal-fired power stations. We do not want to be caught in a situation in which something else could potentially happen within the system to interrupt the whole coal supply. That would be a terrible long-term outcome.

I want to start by saying that Dr Steve Thomas has been quoted in the local paper as saying that what is happening with Griffin Coal is terrible. It is terrible. A number of businesses, both in Collie and across the south west, are owed money because Griffin Coal has gone into receivership. The difference between Dr Steve Thomas and me is that he is certainly trying to whip up fear in my community. I want to show members the difference between his approach and my approach.

I have been contacted by a number of local businesses that are concerned about Griffin Coal, and this is my response, which was in the local paper last week —

Small businesses in Collie play an important role in the local economy. They support our local sporting clubs and organisations and employ local people.

To those businesses who have been affected, please make sure you contact the receivers and check you are registered to be considered for payment. Please feel to contact me—I will do whatever I can to assist.

I said also that, importantly, as members of the Collie community, we can help our local businesses by shopping locally in these difficult times.

In the same column, I also referenced the fact that the shadow Minister for Energy, the member for Cottesloe, Dr David Honey, has certainly changed his tune about Collie. For those who need a reminder, Dr Honey was involved in the Liberals' failed energy policy, also known as a thought bubble, in the lead-up to the 2021 election. The Liberals' plan was, and still is, to close the coal-fired power stations by 2025 and build new hydrogen energy hubs in the midwest. Their plan was to shut the gate and walk away from Collie. The Liberals are trying to undermine what this government is doing to support Collie and my community. The Liberals are trying to undermine a carefully managed and staged approach to phasing out coal-fired power stations and replacing them with new jobs in Collie, not jobs in the midwest. Opposition members do not live in Collie. They do not have a transitioning worker in their family. They are interested only in criticising this government's significant contribution to Collie. They do not care about Collie's long-term future. They very clearly care only about the next election. An opposition member once said to me in Parliament something along the lines of, "I've only ever seen you angry in Parliament once, and you were pretty fired up." My response to him was, "That's because I fight for Collie. It's the job I was elected to do."

I would now like to talk a little bit about the support that this McGowan Labor government, and certainly the Minister for Energy, have given to Collie, and the hope for our future beyond coal. Many members may not be familiar with the fact that coal was not the original source of the major prosperity of the Collie community. Collie has gone through a transition once before. That was from the timber industry. Collie coal has been around for 125 years. In fact, this year we celebrate the fact that Collie has been a gazetted town for 125 years. The major industry in Collie was initially the timber industry. We have transitioned once before and we can transition again. What makes this transition so important is that we have the support of this government and this minister to make sure that we get this right.

The member for Cottesloe referenced Queensland as a model that Western Australia can look towards. For those members who do not know, I am part of a group that was established by the McGowan Labor government called the Collie Just Transition Working Group. That working group has met about every six weeks since 2019, when the closures of units 5 and 6 were first announced, to do the background work that is needed to support this transition for our community. By the time the transition occurs in 2029, this will have been a 10-year process. I think that any transitioning industry around the world would wish to have a 10-year lead-in period. I would like to thank this government and the minister for the support that they are giving our community, and for the fact that we have time to adjust and plan for the future.

I now come back to the idea that Queensland is the leader in this space. Members from the Queensland Energy Union came to Western Australia about two weeks ago and went to Collie to see exactly how things were working with the Collie Just Transition Working Group. They were amazed at the support that this government is giving to the coal system in Collie.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms J.L. HANNS: Their government had said that they had until 2042 to transition away from coal, but I was told that a couple of days after they had returned to Queensland, they were informed that it would now be 2035. This government not only is supporting us, but also, if it proposes to make any changes to our system, has to give three years' notice. We are trying to plan so that it will be very clear to the system and the community that the government is here to provide support and make sure that the community is looked after. As I said, the Just Transition Working Group has been working very hard behind the scenes for the last couple of years, starting in 2019.

Initially, the McGowan government announced that \$100 million of support would be given to the Collie community to help start the transition. The previous member for Collie—Preston, Hon Mick Murray, was obviously part of that process. When the full-scale closure was announced earlier this year, that was topped up with \$547 million to support the transition. Again, I do not know anywhere else in Australia where the government is supporting the coal industry to transition. On behalf of my community, I thank the minister and the government for their support for Collie.

I would like to highlight a couple of aspects of the support package that I have not previously had the opportunity to highlight. I would also like to talk about the fabulous work that members of our community are doing to make sure that we set ourselves up for the longer term. An amount of \$200 million from the Collie industrial transition fund has been set aside to attract major new projects to Collie, with a focus on manufacturing opportunities for Western Australia. I was pleased to hear earlier today about the extension to the manufacturing of railcars in Western Australia. That is exactly the sort of opportunity that we need—high-skilled and high-paying jobs that will create new industries in Western Australia. We are targeting the funding at trying to secure some major industrial projects and are working with some major industry players on a number of very interesting opportunities.

For those members who have not heard about International Graphite, it was given some funding under the Collie Futures fund to enable it to set up a research and development plant to micronise graphite production for battery components. If that was able to occur in Collie and create a new industry, it would be a game changer for not just Collie, but also Western Australia. International Graphite has secured the raw product in Springdale, near Ravensthorpe. The opportunity to value-add to those raw materials within Western Australia means that the supply chain for those emerging industries is creating a circular economy, and Collie will play an important role in that.

On top of the industrial transition fund, money has been dedicated to pay people to do the pipeline of work that is needed around decommissioning the power stations. It is also there to support the workforce transition for Synergy and, really importantly, the coal mine workforce as well. We have added \$2 million to expand the Collie Futures small grants program. Some fabulous projects are coming out of the small grants programs. A couple of weeks ago, I ran a small grants workshop in Collie in conjunction with the South West Development Commission and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It was co-hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. Around 70 people turned up to that information session that I ran for local people to find out about the sorts of opportunities out there for them to secure, with small grants of up to \$100 000 available to either start up a new business that did not previously exist or expand a business that they currently run or own in Collie itself. Those people got the information, followed up with the South West Development Commission, and a number of people have already submitted formal applications to the Collie Futures Economic Advisory Group, of which I am the chair. We assess those applications, look at what jobs are going to be created out of those potential businesses, and decide which businesses we would like to fund. That goes through to the Minister for Regional Development, who then approves—some might say she can also disagree with—and oversees the provision of those grants to local businesses. Some fabulous businesses have already been established in Collie as a result of that funding. I would like to give a small shout-out to Simone Fraser from TraaVerse. On the back of the trails and things that the McGowan government has invested in in Collie, she has been able to set up a trails tour, plus kayaking on Lake Kepwari and some of the local lakes. She has done some incredible work there. She is booked out months and months in advance by people who are really interested in the initiatives of the McGowan government.

I want to talk about tourism for a moment, because we have been so successful in attracting visitors to Collie to see the mural trails, the dam wall and the Collie adventure trails. Last week, two people from Legal Aid came to visit Collie to look at the potential of maybe establishing a virtual office in Collie. They were fabulous. However, the issue for me was that when they tried to book accommodation, it was totally booked. This was a Wednesday night in the middle of the week. The only available accommodation for them was at the workers' camp out near Bluewaters power station. If that does not tell people what this government has already done to support Collie, I do not know what will. The flow-on effect of those visitations and booked-out accommodation means that local hotel owners and retailers all benefit. One of the grants put out by the Collie Futures Economic Advisory Group—as I said, I was the chair of that group—was to help the local drycleaners to supercharge their business because they could not cope with the amount of laundry coming in from all the accommodation providers. That flow-on effect within the local economy is already happening.

The vision for the support of this extended package is that it will also help to replace those jobs that will be transitioned out with the closure of the coal-fired power stations. As I said, my husband is one of those transitioning workers. He will find it challenging. I will give away his age; I am sure I can do the maths! He will be 57 when the transition happens in 2029. That is a challenging age for him to be looking for a new career, but the great thing about the government's support package is that we have funded a jobs and skills centre for local people. That is open to everybody in Collie. It is open to not just the transitioning workforce, but also young people and anyone who is looking for a new career at any stage in their life. That jobs and skills centre is already up and running. It has also created new jobs, because we have employed local people to run that jobs and skills centre. A number of people

who were previously doing different jobs have now been employed in the jobs and skills centre to help transition other workers. It is a fabulous story about how this government is creating opportunities in Collie.

I welcome the opportunity that I was given today to highlight not only the fabulous work that this government is doing to support Collie, but also the work of the Collie community. The Just Transition group that I spoke about is one aspect of that, but, as a community, we are really pulling together and supporting each other. What is not helpful is when members of the opposition speak doom and gloom about the Collie community. Members of my community will remember; they will remember exactly what was said in 2021, and they know when people are changing their tune for a purpose. They can see it and they have told me that they can see it. To conclude, the opposition has initiated a ridiculous discussion today.

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.45 pm]: I rise to make, I must say, a rather unexpected contribution to the debate this evening. I was sitting in the dining room. I am carrying some legislation for the Deputy Premier, so I was prepping, because it is the first time I have had to take a bill through the house. I have had my head in that legislation. I was working away, burrowing away, thinking about the Fair Trading Act all day, and I thought I would grab a bit of dinner, because the dining room opens at six o'clock. I did actually come into the chamber earlier and I had the great privilege of listening to the Minister for Energy's annihilation of members opposite. I reckon that was the best hour I have sat through in this place, and I have sat through five years. All the worse for you, member. I feel for you, my friend. I am not going to make anything personal tonight. I am going to make some points, but I am not going to make any points about the member, so it is fine.

I was sitting there, eating my yellow chicken curry—rather delicious it was this evening—and the Whip came in. She said to me, "Jess, you know we were having a chat and you were in the chamber? The opposition have pulled all their speakers, and we're not sure we're going to be able to" —

Several members interjected.

Ms J.J. SHAW: I am not taking interjections. I sat in silence through the utter garbage that I had to listen to from opposition members, and I expect them to return the same courtesy to me.

I was enjoying my yellow curry, and the member came in and said that she needed a hand because the opposition had pulled all its speakers. That is fundamentally because members opposite simply cannot carry an argument in this portfolio. They were so annihilated by the Minister for Energy that they decided to vacate the field. So here we are, trying to put on the public record what the Western Australian public actually deserves to know about the energy policy in this wonderful state, and the complete absence from members opposite of any considered intellectual thought or understanding of how energy systems operate.

Here I stand, because I have a bit of a background in this field. In my past life, I spent 10 years working in the energy industry before I ran for Parliament. In the last term of Parliament, I chaired the Economics and Industry Standing Committee. We did a two-year-long parliamentary inquiry into distributed energy technology. The sad thing to say about that is that the very man who made the most ridiculous comments on energy policy this evening sat on that very same committee. Granted, he did come through in the second half, because the first half was the former member for Churchlands. What a significant improvement the current member for Churchlands is. She is so collaborative, engaging, non-combative and non-aggressive. It is such a refreshing change.

We did this incredibly lengthy parliamentary inquiry. It was so lengthy, in fact, that when we started the inquiry, we decided to break it down into two parts. For the first part, we decided to do an energy 101 report that basically describes how electricity systems work. It is a remarkably complex field, as the Minister for Energy pointed out today. But there is one incontrovertible truth about it; that is, we cannot fight physics. The Leader of the Liberal Party is on the record as saying that the Liberal Party is a broad church. Does he believe in the laws of physics? If we look at his energy policy statement, we would have to question whether he indeed accepts the laws of physics or whether he paid a blind bit of attention to the two years' worth of evidence we collected and to the incredibly forensic exercise we undertook to understand what it would take to transition our energy economy to a more sustainable footing. I do not believe he heard a word. I am disappointed, because I knew the member for Cottesloe in my past life when he was an executive at Alcoa. I remember the first time I met him. It was on site at Alcoa. We were part of the Kwinana Industries Council. We were on a bus. Alcoa was showing off its carbon sequestration project using red mud. I remember talking to the member, thinking he was a pretty cluey guy and clearly a very accomplished engineer. I just wonder whether he was given some sort of lobotomy and then entered Parliament and became the Leader of the Liberal Party. Clearly, there is some sort of forgetfulness about all the things that we learnt.

The microgrids inquiry, which the minister referred to, took us through the sorts of transitions we would need to undertake. We had incredible engagement from industry. Industry engaged with our committee every step of the way, much as industry has engaged with this government subsequently. During the inquiry, we went on to develop the energy transformation strategy. Industry has engaged, it has provided feedback and it has overwhelmingly endorsed

what we are doing. Not only Western Australian industry, but also east coast industry participants and people from overseas look at us with envy. They see what we are doing here. They see that we are leading the way in this nation.

It is a shame that the member for Cottesloe was not with us when we went to the United States. In fact, the former member for Warren–Blackwood was with us. The Leader of the Liberal Party should probably book in a bit of time with him because I am sure he could have enlightened the member on how overseas markets were looking at the sorts of things that we had here, such as a non-privatised full line of sight from electron production right through to consumption and state-owned enterprises, and the capacity to regulate markets such that we could effect a transition and set up our systems and markets as a shock absorber to the incredible transformation that was going on, brought about by the increased penetration of distributed energy resources in our system. It is a shame that the member was not there for that, but he was there for the second part, which is when we really started to get into the guts of all this. We made a whole series of findings and recommendations. Findings were made about things that the state government was already doing that it was patently obvious needed to be done that had not been done at the beginning of the inquiry but that the minister was on top of. There were a whole series of recommendations about other initiatives that we workshopped as a group. We went through them page by page, line by line, looking at every full stop, comma and capital letter. The member for Cottesloe sat there shotgun the whole way through. What do we know? The government has taken up those recommendations and it is now getting on with the job. I would argue that it has moved beyond the recommendations that we made. As I said, we were in lockstep with industry.

This memory loss or lack of attention to detail or these harebrained ideas are rather consistent with those of the energy ministers we saw when we were opposition. I was working in the industry back in 2011. I remember heading up to Fraser's on 3 March 2011, I think, to listen to the launch of Minister Collier's state energy initiative. It tanked. It took 18 months. The minister produced a four-page pamphlet that basically contained a lot of pictures and absolutely no policy substance whatsoever. To a roomful of energy experts and participants and stakeholders from all points along the energy supply chain, he proceeded to deliver a speech about how he was a teacher and he cared about education. Honestly, it was laughable! Christ knows—I do not know why the Liberal Party retained him in the upper house. I withdraw that word. The former minister certainly has not improved his position.

Hon Mike Nahan, the former member for Riverton, and I worked together at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia way back in the day, back in the early 2000s. In fact, the two of us worked on the CCI's energy policy together. I have an abiding respect for his intellectual capacity. I felt very sorry for him when he was the Minister for Energy, because I know that a lot of his thoughts, at least back in the day, were on energy policy. They were good. He had some pretty cluey ideas on a range of fronts. We were probably not as far along the path in realising the impact of distributed energy in those days. At every point along the way, every time he had a thought bubble, the former member for Cottesloe—maybe this is a thing—absolutely poleaxed him; he just shut him down. Every time he had a good idea, Colin Barnett, this supposed expert energy economist, shut him down. I felt very sorry for the former member for Riverton because he was really quite hamstrung.

Let us roll forward to the 2021 election and have a bit of a chat. An incredibly educative experience was offered to the current member for Cottesloe. He could have meaningfully contributed to the debate on distributed energy technologies and shown some bipartisanship, which the former member for Warren–Blackwood did. I go back to my point that with some things in energy policy, we cannot fight physics. There are some truths that we have to accept. If we were responsible policymakers, to some things we should say, “You know what? I might as an opposition member have a deep-seated ideological commitment to privatisation when all the evidence shows me that it screws electricity systems and it absolutely rorts consumers so that they end up paying so much more for their electricity, but maybe I should see the light in this even broader church and get on board, accept the reality of physics and just do some things that are genuinely in the public interest. Rather than coming up with inane thought bubbles or completely unhelpful commentary on what is an incredibly important policy issue for the future of this state, I should grow up and try to get myself into the twenty-first century.” I know it is a struggle for the Liberal Party, but it should give it a go and see how it goes.

It did have a go, but it cooked up this incredibly implausible plan. It announced something that was completely undeliverable: net zero carbon emissions in the electricity system, with 100 per cent clean energy to Western Australian homes; a \$3 billion 1 500-megawatt renewable energy project by 2025; and the closure of all state-owned coal-fired power stations by 2025 and some transmission infrastructure, because what it was proposing to build was about as far away as we could possibly get from load and from existing transmission assets. If the opposition had any idea of how electricity pricing works, it would understand that that is probably the worst thing it could do in terms of putting downward pressure on electricity prices, particularly network costs. We should utilise our existing network assets to the greatest extent possible, rather than building new stuff, the cost of which we will have to pass on to the taxpayer. The opposition just does not get it.

Anyway, the opposition's new energy plan was a complete farce. Its time frames were unrealistic, it would have caused blackouts and what about the costs? Does anyone remember the three wise monkeys' press conference? It is hard to forget. I think my eyeballs are still scarred. It was absolutely farcical. The opposition came out and

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 October 2022]

p4730b-4755a

Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

said that its energy policy plan would cost around \$125 million. The state government estimated, in conjunction with WA Treasury and based on information provided by Synergy, that it would cost billions of dollars. That was absolutely crazy. Nonetheless, the member for Cottesloe trotted out the plan. He was the architect, the expert, the great engineer of the Liberal Party. In a media conference, according to my notes, he said —

I'm extremely excited to be part of this announcement. This policy is really the next phase of industrial development in the state of Western Australia. We believe that Western Australia and the government should be targeting zero net emissions by 2030.

That is an absolutely worthy ambition. We have to be realistic in the way we go about these things. The member for Cottesloe's leader at the time recognised that Dr David Honey was the expert in this area. Zak Kirkup said that on 11 February 2021.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.