

GERALDTON POWER SURGE

310. Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to a front-page article in the *Geraldton Guardian* of Monday, 31 May, which describes a massive power surge in the city of Geraldton.

- (1) Is the minister prepared to review the plight of the more than 70 Geraldton residents who suffered equipment damage estimated at \$200 000 as a result of the surge in the suburb of Spalding on Sunday, 17 May this year?
- (2) Has the minister sought an explanation from Western Power of why it publicly blamed a lightning strike for the big surge despite the Bureau of Meteorology having no record of lightning that afternoon?

Mr E.S. RIPPER replied:

(1)-(2) Mr Speaker -

Mr P.D. Omodei: The minister is thunderstruck!

Mr M.W. Trenorden: He is a bolt!

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the member for Warren-Blackwood and the Leader of the National Party.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Mr Speaker, I think I actually have to pay that interjection from the member for Warren-Blackwood. It was one of his better ones.

Mr M.J. Birney interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the member for Kalgoorlie.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I do sympathise with the people in Geraldton who have lost electrical equipment. That must be a significant burden for those people. Naturally, I have sought advice from Western Power as to the circumstances of the incident and the reasons that Western Power has not seen fit to offer compensation in this case, whereas in the case of another suburb in Geraldton in which there were power problems it did offer compensation. The policy that has applied in Western Power for many years, including under the previous coalition Government, is that if there is some negligence on the part of Western Power or some failure of Western Power's equipment to operate as it should, then Western Power and its insurers will pay compensation. However, if the outage is due to natural events, such as a storm or lightning, or the activities of others, such as vandals, Western Power will not pay compensation. Western Power's compensation is, of course, paid by its insurers. Western Power is therefore required to act responsibly and in accordance with the provisions of its insurance policy lest the compensation end up having to come from essentially the pockets of the taxpayers.

With regard to the events and the lightning strike, my advice from Western Power - I need to rely on that advice; I do not have any other information - is that the lightning strike occurred at some time prior to the power surge that caused the difficulty, but the lightning strike caused damage to equipment that later resulted in the power surge. In other words -

Mr C.J. Barnett: Come on!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The master economic commentator opposite also is a brilliant electrical engineer, it seems, and he is better placed to explain how lightning can damage a piece of electrical equipment and cause a power surge than the expert and professional electrical engineers employed by Western Power. That is the explanation that has been given to me by Western Power. However, if the member representing his constituents, or any other member representing those constituents, has information that would contradict or throw doubt on Western Power's explanation, I would be very happy to receive that information, I would be very happy to put it to Western Power, and I would be very happy to get advice on that further to what I have already received.