

SYNERGY — BILLING SYSTEM

**253. Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to answers from additional questions from the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations subsequent to the Synergy annual report hearing of 20 October 2011 in which a report on the number of estimated bills could not be provided until 30 November 2011 because Synergy did not keep a compiled record of estimated bills.

- (1) Is it acceptable that Synergy does not keep a record of how many bills are estimated?
- (2) Since that hearing, has the minister taken any action to ensure that Synergy monitors more closely the level of estimation in meter reading; and, if so, what specific action has he taken?
- (3) If the minister has taken no action on this matter, why not?

**Hon PETER COLLIER replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

- (1)–(3) This gets back to the issue that a number of members opposite raised about the Synergy billing system yesterday with regard to estimated billing, with regard to blow-outs, with regard to overdue accounts and one thing or another, which have largely been as a result of the implementation of a new billing system, which was signed off by the previous government—as I said!

Yes, there have been issues with the billing system. I acknowledged that yesterday. They are issues that I do not particularly appreciate. In terms of every specific issue that has been mentioned, I can assure the honourable member that, yes, I make my opinions quite clear to the chairman and to the chief executive officer of Synergy on a regular basis to ensure that that system provides as seamless a service as possible, particularly with regard to estimated accounts, which in essence provide a huge degree of uncertainty to a lot of people who simply do not know how an estimated account is arrived at or how Synergy arrives at an estimated account every two months.

The responses that I have received from Synergy on a regular basis is that it has been ironing out those processes and as far as I am concerned pretty much all the issues that have plagued the new billing system for the past 12 to 18 months have largely been rectified. There will continue to be issues. When we are dealing with over one million customers, there will inevitably be issues. It is the same with any billing system; it does not matter whether it is Telstra, Optus or whoever it may be, there will be issues with billing systems when multiple bills go out. I am sure that no-one in this chamber has not had an issue with an Optus or Telstra bill, a Visa card bill, a credit card bill or whatever it might be, and Synergy is no different. The issue with the new billing system with Synergy —

**Hon Sue Ellery:** They're all bad so that's okay?

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** What a glass-half-empty sort of approach that is. No; it is not good at all. That is why I said, and what I continue to say to Synergy: we want to have as minimalist an approach to the issues as we possibly can. If there is a billing system that caters for over one million customers, there will inevitably be issues with that billing system, and particularly when that billing system is new. However, now that billing system has the capacity to provide more information to customers and it provides more access to online payment et cetera, it will therefore inevitably be a much-improved billing system, which it is. To the honourable member, yes, it is very high in terms of my priorities as minister. And, yes, I have made my views consistently felt to the chairman and CEO of Synergy, and as far as I am concerned and according to all the information that has been provided to me, those improvements have been made and therefore, I must take Synergy at its word.