

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE - FIFTH REPORT -  
PETITION ON WESTERN POWER'S UNDERGROUND POLICY**

*Committee*

Resumed from 11 December 2003. The Chairman of Committees (Hon George Cash) in the Chair.

*Motion*

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I move -

That the report be noted.

In the absence of the chairman of the committee, who is away from the Chamber on urgent parliamentary business, I will make a few quick comments on the report. I have an interest in underground power policy. However, this report relates more to the planning process and underground power requirements for larger blocks and things of that nature than it does to the normal residential underground power policy arrangements that are in place. The recommendation of the committee is that the Minister for Energy, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection examine the issue to ensure clarity and consistency in the application of Western Power's underground power policy. A quick glance through the report would suggest that there is the potential for some inconsistency between Western Power's underground power policy and the views expressed by the Western Australian Planning Commission. With regard to Western Power's underground power policy, the report states at page 5 -

Western Power is committed to progressively underground the electricity supply, consistent with Government policy.

I hope the policy is a bit broader than just that and we are given some idea of which localities are likely to be given access to underground power ahead of others, bearing in mind that the intention of our Government when we initiated the underground power policy was to progressively underground power in all of the existing suburbs. Although I was not always enthusiastic about some of the suburbs that were given first bite of the cherry, I could understand the reason for that, because they were often seaside suburbs in which overhead power was a problem because of the build-up of salt on the powerlines and conductors.

Hon Kim Chance: Yes.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: There is a good technical reason for undergrounding power in those suburbs. On the other hand, those suburbs are generally very expensive suburbs in which to live, and the capital appreciation for those residents from that undergrounding is probably considerable. I hope that over time all of the overhead powerlines in suburbia, not just in the metropolitan area but also in country towns, are put underground. I first raised this matter in this Chamber about 20 years ago, and I was told that it was not possible to do it because it would cost far too much. However, the policy that our Government put in place of a cost-sharing arrangement between the landowner, the local authority and the Government seemed to me to be a pretty good way of doing business. I do not know how much undergrounding the Government is doing these days. I have kept a bit of an eye on it, and I suspect it is not at the forefront of Western Power's list of priorities. I hope it is, but we will need to wait and see. I am interested to know whether the committee report has been responded to. If it has not, perhaps the minister representing the Minister for Energy will ensure that that happens at sometime in the near future.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I do not know whether it would be useful, in response to the question raised by the Leader of the Opposition, if I were to move that we adjourn the debate -

Hon Norman Moore: It does not really matter. Just drop me a note sometime.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: In that case, I will respond to the question in the manner that has been suggested by the Leader of the Opposition. With those words, I support the noting of the report.

Hon BILL STRETCH: This ties in rather neatly with a question I asked the Leader of the House about the supply of timber power poles to the electricity transmission industry. I rise mainly to reinforce a message brought to the Chamber some weeks ago by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance, Hon Barry House, regarding the reduced cost of undergrounding powerlines in country areas. Some of the figures that he quoted that night are well worth emblazoning on the Government's memory. He was quoting about a 50 per cent reduction as against the cost of overhead powerlines. If that were to be the case, it would be a very strong underlining of the response that the minister gave that we will clearly have difficulty in the future in supplying poles for overhead power transmission lines.

**Extract from Hansard**  
[COUNCIL - Friday, 2 April 2004]  
p1646a-1657a

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

There is no question about the benefit of undergrounding powerlines. My landlady lives near the beach at Cottesloe. The number of people using kite boards, windsurfing boards and hang-gliders who had near misses with overhead powerlines or got tangled up in them had the potential for disaster and loss of life. It was not only the visual enhancement but also the safety concerns of such areas along the coast that made the undergrounding of power very popular and a meaningful and sensible policy of the Governments of the day. There seems to be a certain amount of conflict in Western Power's policy. I note the comment from the general manager of networks that Western Power is moving progressively towards the undergrounding of powerlines. However, that rather conflicted with the response given to Hon Barry House when he mentioned the subject to Western Power and was told that it was prohibitively expensive and Western Power was not considering it even though it had undertaken the experimental undergrounding of powerlines in the south west.

I urge the Government to take note of those developments, particularly after the Tenterden and Bridgetown fires, because if the figures are sustainable, the potential to replace those overhead lines is of inestimable value to the community and a very sensible commercial alternative for a Government of whatever persuasion. A suitably equipped D10 or D11 with the right cable-laying equipment attached can lay a lot of line in a day. This has been seen with Telstra. It is now hard to find an overhead phone line in the country. There were earlier problems caused by white ants eating the insulation, but they seem to have been mostly overcome, although I understand there are a few problems in the north of the State, where white ants seem to be particularly voracious. I understand that even they are being overcome. There seems to be nothing to stop the Government, if it has a mind to do so, from proceeding quickly and reasonably effectively with the stated policy of extending the laying of underground powerlines. There is obviously one contractor that is equipped to do the job. If contracts are available, I have no doubt that private enterprise will very quickly take up the slack and provide the machinery to do the job..

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I did not listen to everything that the member has just said. I presume that the member is aware that the underground power strategies are continuing to be rolled out by the Government, which is calling for partnerships with local councils. That call is out again right now for the next round for councils that are interested in participating with Western Power in the provision of underground power. Is the member aware of that information or is it irrelevant for the purposes of his contribution?

Hon Bill Stretch: I was aware of it. It tends to apply to settled areas where there is a greater density of connections.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: I think the member is probably right and that it is largely in urban areas. The Council of the Town of Port Hedland was successful last time. I was keen to make sure there were more successful councils. Typically, the work is done around urban centres.

Hon BILL STRETCH: I did not intend to speak on this matter, but I will elaborate on what the minister has said. I made the point that most of the pressure for undergrounding is coming from urban and semi-rural subdivisions. Hon Barry House made the point that there is an obvious opening for the application of undergrounding by the replacement of an enormous mileage of line in country areas. We have all heard of reports - I have raised some myself - of the extensive damage to and the perilous state of the power supply network in many country areas. This initiative of underground laying on a large scale in broadacre areas has tremendous potential to get the Government and the taxpayer off the hook to a great extent, particularly in view of the minister's comments on the supply of power poles. There is a more expensive alternative, whereby spun concrete or steel is used, but it is a matter that the Government must take hold of immediately. Believe me, the problem in rural areas is getting worse by the hour. The poles there are more dangerous now than they were a week ago. Some have become very bad indeed just through the fluxion of time. When an opportunity like this comes along, the Government should grasp it with both hands and lay many of these cables in fields as economically as it can. I am not terribly concerned about whether the partnership is with local government or anyone else. Power must be regarded as a social service, which is really a government responsibility. The Government cannot afford to wait for communities to pick up the tab, as some communities are financially overstressed at present anyway. The Government should consider this matter with great priority. The summer weather is a long way from being finished. We do not want any more tragedies like the ones that have occurred in the past few months.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: As a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance and as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, I will make some brief comments about the report. I urge members to read the response to the report that I tabled on Tuesday on behalf of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. It enhances and brings forward the debate to where we are on these issues. Members who have read the report will have seen clearly that there has been debate - that may be a slightly strong word - between government agencies and that Western Power has a policy of requiring undergrounding in new subdivisions. The Western Australian Planning Commission has maintained a view in the past that subdivisions can have undergrounding on condition that they meet Western Power's requirements. The

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

argument is whether Western Power's requirements are too onerous. I understand that in this case there was some debate about whether there should be some flexibility in the requirements for a fairly small subdivision of basically two blocks; it was not a subdivision on a broad scale. The response from the minister, which I tabled, outlines the issues fairly concisely. I have the tabled copy with me and when I complete my comments I will send it to Hon Bill Stretch. I am not supposed to bring this matter into the debate, but the President of the Legislative Council has shown a strong interest in this issue on behalf of his constituents.

As I said, the agencies have been meeting since October last year to work through and find a better resolution to the issue. I am sure members will be pleased with what I believe is the constructive approach that has been taken by all agencies, in particular the WAPC, to find a resolution to these matters. Rather than go through it in great detail, I urge members to look at the minister's response. The debate could be adjourned for members to look at it, or the report could be noted and members could read it in their own time.

I am aware of the comments Hon Barry House made about the cost of undergrounding power. I have followed and taken some interest in this issue. Interestingly, as a representative of my constituents, I had a meeting with Western Power employees only yesterday about issues concerning the northern suburbs. I asked them whether power could be laid underground in that area. I am sure Western Power would be prepared to brief members about the cost of undergrounding power. Members must keep in mind that there are two very different types of power supplies: the transmission and the distribution. As I understand it, the cost of transmission is expensive. Yesterday the people from Western Power told me that they wished they had known I was going to raise that matter because they would have brought with them a dissected piece of cable to show me. When one sees the cabling, one realises why it is so expensive. The cabling is very expensive because it requires insulation to be placed around -

Hon Bruce Donaldson: It is a very high voltage.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The transmission is a high voltage. The power goes through the mainstream transmission lines, which go to the substations, and then through the distribution system. The transmission lines are very expensive, as are the associated costs and infrastructure. People often get confused when they talk about underground power. They put the lot into one barrel. They say that because it is cheap in one place, it must be cheaper in another.

Hon Peter Foss: It is very different economics.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: They are very different situations, depending on the type -

Hon Peter Foss: Mind you, you have fewer high tension lines than low tension lines.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The point I make is that the type of underground power must be differentiated; that is, whether it is transmission or distribution. That is my main point. I agree with Hon Peter Foss that the economics are very different. Members must be clear about that. When members speak about it in this Chamber, people hear the words "underground power" and think of it as a homogenous situation. The point I make - I think I am getting agreement from members around the Chamber - is that there are two very different situations.

Another issue is the distribution and the lower voltage around the suburbs. Hon Tom Stephens said that the private sector does much of the undergrounding.

Hon Peter Foss: And it does it well.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I do not argue with that. The point I was about to make is that it is easy to determine the figures. The undergrounding of cables is done in a very competitive market. The actual figures do not quite add up to the figures that people often bandy about; there is a differential in cost. We should take that into consideration when considering upgrading the networks. Speaking as a local member, I have told the Minister for Energy that the undergrounding of power in the metropolitan area should be paid for by those who benefit from it. Unless the cabling is due for automatic replacement, I believe that people should have to pay for the underground cabling that is laid past their house. I happily make the comment that I do not support the Government's scheme. I do not believe in it. I think that money could be better spent in other areas.

I am well aware of the issues in regional Western Australia. The infrastructure has been in place for between 30 and 50 years, and it is now coming up for renewal. The State is facing a massive cost to upgrade that infrastructure. We have made significant commitments, but I also accept that more needs to be done. If we got rid of the metropolitan scheme and added the money allocated to that scheme to the money that the Government is already spending to upgrade the regional networks, it would be a very small fraction of the total. I would be quite happy for the money allocated to the scheme in the metropolitan area to be used to assist in the upgrade of infrastructure in regional areas. It would not be a significant difference. The people who live particularly in the

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

older suburbs in Perth, which have experienced massive increases in land values and which experience massive increases in land values when underground power is provided, should pay for that infrastructure, as do my constituents in the outer northern suburbs when they buy blocks of land. People who buy blocks in areas such as Butler or the Brighton estate pay for their underground power in the infrastructure costs associated with the cost of developing the land. Having said that, the amount allocated to the scheme is not significant and would not make a huge difference in regional Western Australia. The point I want to make is that providing underground power in regional Western Australia - I understand the benefits - is more expensive. It would mean that the roll-out in regional Western Australia could be done more slowly. If the upgrade were not done as quickly, that would have a bigger impact than if all the money allocated to the metropolitan scheme were transferred to the upgrade of infrastructure in regional areas.

Hon Bill Stretch: Do you have an indicative estimate of the difference in costs for say 132 000 homes cabled in the country with major transmission lines as opposed to the stuff around the city? Are you saying that the extra heavy cable needed would make it prohibitive?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The advice given to me by Western Power indicates that the cost differentials for transmission lines are significant. In fact, I have some idea of the figures, but that information has been gathered by a committee on which I serve, so I had better not cite them to the House.

Hon Bill Stretch: It might be useful to have them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It would be a useful thing. It is the minister's portfolio, but, if members would like, it might be useful to talk to Western Power about offering to members a briefing on the costs. We did not get into the exact figures yesterday.

Hon PETER FOSS: I will put a slightly different slant on underground power. I raised this issue during debate on the electricity legislation, and I think it is often missed. During that debate, the Greens (WA) tried to suggest that we should insert in the legislation a minimum percentage alternative power objective. The Opposition, along with the Government, opposed that proposition. I said that I thought a far more important objective that we should be aiming at was saving power. The capital costs of putting in the extra equipment to produce power and the capital costs of putting in alternative forms of power are extremely high. We have seen how sometimes the short-sighted saving of money can cause big problems in the future; for example, the infill sewerage program that the previous Government instituted. It was a billion-dollar program. However, it was done as a result of a saving of money after the Second World War, because the cost was saved on the subdivision of land. Of course, it costs an awful lot more money, even in real terms, to put in that infrastructure afterwards. It became clear that it was necessary to do it on environmental grounds. It is a major environmental project. It was instituted not only to help the aesthetics of the area and the value of the land, but also for environmental reasons.

A lot of people do not realise that the underground power scheme is also an environmental project. I hammered this point all the time when we were in government. I had to fight like blazes because I could never get anybody to understand this. I raised this same point during debate on the electricity legislation. I referred to an article that was published in *Scientific American* about 10 years before I entered Parliament - so it is now some time ago. The city of Chicago had done a calculation of the heat sink effect of roads.

Most people know that if a person were to walk barefoot across a bitumen road on a hot summer day, his feet would be burnt. However, if that same distance were covered over with grass, native vegetation or something of that nature, his feet would not be burnt. We all know that most of our life on this planet is sustained by energy from the sun. The sun shines on plants, the plants produce carbohydrates using the energy of the sun and that energy is consumed by those plants. A lot of other things go into many of the dynamic systems, such as the evaporation of water into the air and the falling of rain; however, all these things end up being driven by the sun. Practically every single energy source except nuclear power is driven by the sun. What we do not realise is that when we build huge cities and cover areas in concrete and bitumen, we produce a heat sink. Those materials do not consume energy, they just absorb it and eventually radiate it out again. Big cities are hotter than little places because of this enormous sink of heat.

This was drawn very much to my attention years ago when I was in Portugal. We were driving along a road in the south of Portugal and the weather was hot, just like in Western Australia. However, we were beautifully cool because of an overarching canopy of Australian gum trees planted along the side of the road. I thought to myself, "How come I can drive around on a cool road in Portugal covered by Australian gum trees, and at home all I see along either side of the road is these mutilated box trees?" The interesting thing was that until recently, the councils had this wonderful idea that if they mutilated the box trees on one side of the road to keep them away from the power lines, they should, to balance things, mutilate the ones on the other side. It would be rather like going around after people who had lost one arm and saying, "You are looking a bit unbalanced with one arm missing - we will lop the other one off!" That was the exact logic applied by the councils. However, the

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

dreadful thing about it was that they allowed the heat sink effect of those roads to become even greater. What do we do when the city gets hotter, particularly at night when the roads are radiating heat? We put on the airconditioner, which does two things: cools the inside of the house and heats the outside. At the same time it throws out a lot of moisture that increases the humidity, and so we get hotter.

Hon Giz Watson: Put the fan on.

Hon PETER FOSS: I use a fan; I do not use airconditioning. What people do not realise is that we are sitting in our own hot little fug. Some of these things could be easily dealt with, and one way is to put power underground. If we underground power, we can grow street trees. If we grow street trees, they can cover the bitumen. If they cover the bitumen, the heat sink would be reduced because the energy, instead of going into the hot bitumen and radiating out, would go into producing more leaves and branches. It is a simple point. However, what really brought it home to me was a survey done in Chicago about 25 years ago that calculated the heat sink effect of the roads there. The figure was that every hour the heat sink effect of the roads and the buildings in Chicago cost 400 000 cubic metres of greenhouse gas, which translated to \$400 000 worth of electricity. Amazing when we think about it! That is the figure for Chicago, which is not as hot as Perth. Generally speaking, the United States has cheaper electricity than we do, and this survey was done 25 years ago. Have members any idea what the cost of the heat sink effect is in Western Australia? I do not disagree with Hon Ken Travers' theory that it would be nice that if people were going to have the value of their land increased by having underground power, they should pay for it. However, that generally leads to people voting against the idea and it does not happen, so the councils do not get involved. We will have to pay for a new power station. The environment will suffer because of the heat sink effect. This is an environmental measure. It could be said that everyone would receive benefit from cleaning up the Swan River, but the people alongside the river should pay for it. That is a good idea, but it will not happen. If people bothered to do it, there is a good economic case to underground all existing non-underground power and to encourage the councils to grow trees that will cover up our roads so that we do not have these boiling hot roads that are busily soaking up the heat and then radiating it during the night. We are creating a major environmental problem for ourselves which we are currently solving by consuming vast quantities of electricity.

Members probably did not like being caught out by the lack of gas the other day, but heat sink was one of the causes. The consumption of electricity on that day would not have been so great if we had street trees - good, big street trees - that formed canopies over the roads. It sounds too simple. It is simple, but often the simple solutions are the ones that work.

Hon Ed Dermer: I wonder if the enclosing effect would have a psychological effect on drivers and slow them down.

Hon PETER FOSS: It might. There is something about driving under a canopy that is quite calming. By way of an example, when I drive home past Hyde Park on a hot night with all the trees there, it is like driving past a refrigerator with the door open. The trees and all the greenery sort of slow me down and I feel quite calm. The member could be right.

Hon Ed Dermer: I was thinking about the narrower roads. They say that a narrow road slows a driver down. I wonder whether the canopy would have the same effect.

Hon PETER FOSS: It is purely a supposition on my part. The member could be right. It does have a calming effect. People would feel cooler, they could open the windows of their car and drive along without the airconditioner on. It makes a huge difference. We have some of the best big trees in the world and we do not use them. When we do plant them we chop them out. They used to core them. They used to take the middle out of them. They shape them now, which is a bit better, but they are still stunted trees instead of being full trees. This is an environmental measure and it should be implemented for that reason.

HON GIZ WATSON: I was not intending to speak on this matter, but I have been moved by the comments of Hon Peter Foss.

Hon Tom Stephens: Are you on his preselection panel?

Hon GIZ WATSON: I will try to express my views without fear or favour. The member has made a very good point. I am particularly interested in the undergrounding of power, because one of the things that I have been wanting to do on my property is to plant native trees of choice. There is a beautiful banksia on the nature strip, and I am hoping the power goes underground before it gets so tall that it will have to be lopped by the contractors who come around and do that. However, I concur that a full analysis of our power use and energy efficiency has not been done.

Hon Peter Foss: And the economic costs.

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[COUNCIL - Friday, 2 April 2004]  
p1646a-1657a

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

Hon GIZ WATSON: And the economic costs of those factors. We should also add to the equation the increased shading effect of growing, in the urban area, trees in their natural form and of a more appropriate size, to provide a shading effect on urban streets. It would also remove the cost of having to pay tree loppers to come around every six months or so, which is an energy cost and an additional cost for councils. I agree with Hon Peter Foss that the results are appalling. Box trees are Queensland subtropical trees that grow beautifully if they are allowed to grow to their natural shape and form in their natural environment, but they are totally inappropriate for a Mediterranean climate where they are pruned to go under powerlines. The other advantage is that a variety of local trees could be used in the urban streetscape. One of the nice things about the area of Floreat in which I live is that at least one street has a beautiful line of local melaleucas - paperbarks - which flower magnificently. They have been planted in that street because there are no powerlines, so people can enjoy the full presentation of a local, native tree. They do not need watering and all those other things, and they attract birds that are indigenous to the area.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: The roots lift footpaths as well, don't they?

Hon GIZ WATSON: There are no footpaths in that area. Footpaths are not a problem in that case. Melaleucas are not particularly known for lifting footpaths, although sheoaks or Moreton Bay figs might be. I encourage the Government to take on board those comments. I do not want to be flippant about it. It is really important that we undertake energy accounting in a way that takes heat sinks into consideration. That is one of my passions. We should not have airconditioners. If I choose to supercool my bit of space and release the heat for everybody else, that is incredibly selfish.

Hon Peter Foss: It is not only the heat you take out of the house but also the heat you make in doing it.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Sure. We need to be a lot smarter in the way in which we calculate energy consumption and with what is and is not taken into consideration. Of course, it begs the question of what role the Government is taking in regulating and directing that. I refer briefly to the Government's greenhouse strategy, which also does not touch on these kinds of whole-of-cycle accounting issues. There is a strong argument that if the figures took the impact of heat sinks into account - bitumen, concrete and those sorts of components of an urban environment - it might be considered to be good economics to grow more trees in urban areas, as that policy and direction could save energy in the long run. I wanted to add my enthusiasm for the part of the argument on undergrounding power. Aesthetic and property-value factors are not the only considerations; it also has serious implications for the quality of urban living and reduced energy use.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I have started something, have I not! I make it clear that they were my personal views. The Government continues to support the policy of undergrounding power. The Minister for Energy recently called for another round of funding submissions from local governments for them to go down that path. In response to the comments of Hon Peter Foss, I accept that there are environmental benefits from doing that. He added a useful comment. I am not opposed to the undergrounding of power. If I were asked tomorrow whether I wanted underground power down the front of my street, I would fully support it. I would fully support incurring the cost of that as a resident of that street.

Hon Peter Foss: Not everybody would, you see, and that stops it happening.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The interesting point is that we happily tell residents of new subdivisions that they must have underground power. I suspect that around 60 per cent of Perth has underground power that was paid for by the owners of those properties when they purchased their blocks of land.

Hon Peter Foss: I don't have a problem with your logic, but it stands as an obstacle to it happening.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If the view of the Parliament was that it supported the undergrounding of power for the environmental benefits that would result, and if it happily mandated a program for the undergrounding of power and the placement of that charge on local residents, that would happen. Of course, no-one ever wants to put his hand in his pocket unless he has to. However, his power supply may be impacting on the environment. I do not expect to ever win the argument with the Government. I hope one day I might be able to reduce the component of government subsidy and increase the contribution from the individual resident. I would gain the aesthetic value as well from underground power because I live in a street with a lovely line of jacaranda trees. Although they are not natives, when in flower, they would provide a magnificent canopy over the road if they could grow on both sides of the street. It would look beautiful and provide a magnificent canopy. I am not sure about the cost for the local council in sweeping up the leaf litter, which people would demand.

Hon Giz Watson: They sweep the streets anyway.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Does the member know jacaranda trees?

**Extract from Hansard**  
[COUNCIL - Friday, 2 April 2004]  
p1646a-1657a

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

Hon Giz Watson: Yes.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: When I was kid, we would sweep the backyard because of the jacaranda trees, and it would need sweeping again after one hour.

Hon Graham Giffard: That would be a commentary on your sweeping, no doubt.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If Hon Graham Giffard knew anything about jacaranda trees, he would know what I am talking about.

I have no problem with the concept of moving to underground power in the metropolitan area. I understand the point Hon Peter Foss is making about encouragement.

Hon Peter Foss: I would agree with your point if it were not environmental.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If I am doing something that has a negative impact on the environment, I have an obligation to make my contribution to improve the environment. Hon Peter Foss's analogy about the Swan River is not applicable. The impact on the Swan River is occurring at every drain running into the river. I do not put fertiliser on my front yard because my side of the ridge drains into the Swan River.

Hon Peter Foss: It is the heat you are creating, not the run-off.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I do not think I have switched on my airconditioning this summer.

Several members interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! We are dealing with Western Power.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If we are having a negative impact on the environment because of the power supply going to my house and my neighbours' houses, my personal opinion is that the cost of replacing that means of power supply should be borne by the recipients. I receive the aesthetic benefits and property value benefits for that contribution; therefore, I see no problem with it. A system is needed to provide equity. For instance, it is fair enough that my parents not be required to front up with the capital cost to put underground power to their house. The capital cost could sit on their bill. At some time in the future, I hope a long time into the future, when they are no longer with us -

Hon Peter Foss: As occurs with the country electricity scheme.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes. At that stage, that amount could be recouped from the settlement of the house as a transfer point.

Hon Peter Foss: That can be done with local government rates.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Indeed. I accept that some equity is needed. People like me and the majority of my neighbours in the older established areas of Perth with their rapidly increasing property prices should make a contribution to the cost of underground power for environmental and other reasons. It should be done as good citizens. It is never easy to argue a case for people to stick their hands in their pockets to make a contribution to the environment. Whether it is for reasons of the environment, aesthetics or property values, my personal view is that I am happy to pay, and for that money to be used to upgrade the network in regional Western Australia. It would not make a huge difference, but it would represent another contribution. Hon Giz Watson is able to afford it as well.

As I was about to say in my earlier comments, it will be a trade-off in country areas, which do not have the same environmental heat issues, between providing underground power or the overhead supply of power, which is more expensive. I accept that a large life cycle costing has to be done on that concerning maintenance and other costs that need to apply over the life of the overhead power versus underground power project. We need to upgrade the network. As I understand it, on current costings, if we were to move toward underground power, it would mean we would not be able to replace the network as quickly as with overhead power. That is the great challenge that we would need to engage in. Concerning the specific issues of the report, hopefully, they will be addressed because they were really about inequities in small-scale subdivisions in which the cost of putting power underground is exorbitant compared with the benefits. As I mentioned earlier, those issues are being worked through to see whether we can come up with a policy that allows for those exceptions to the rule when looking at the overall costs of putting power underground. There is no doubt that we will need to upgrade the network through regional Western Australia.

We face a challenge. I do not want to bring back past debates but there is no doubt that one of the benefits of the Government's policies on energy reform is that we would have freed up capital to be used in generating energy for the network for the purposes of upgrading the network, which is urgently required. It was certainly one of

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

the motivations for the Government to implement energy reform. I tell Hon Peter Foss that I think we have a twin challenge: we need to reduce demand for electricity and, as we bring on new energy streams, we need to increase the amount of energy coming from renewable sources. I certainly agree that one of the elements of any good strategy should be demand management, including removing heat sinks, encouraging people to reduce the use of airconditioners, and to reduce energy consumption in any other way people can. It is a great challenge. It is one of the problems we have faced in Western Australia over the past 12 months. The growth in energy demand has been astronomical; it has been extraordinary. It is largely driven by the use of airconditioners. It is one of the great challenges. If it continues at that level, it will be unabated and have massive greenhouse implications for us. I agree completely that we need to reduce energy demand.

Hon PETER FOSS: From a philosophical point of view and if we were talking only about aesthetics, I would agree entirely. I would also agree with Hon Ken Travers about property values. It is fair that if people get cheaper land as a result of the land being developed more cheaply, they should be prepared to pay the cost of putting those things in afterwards. I do not have a philosophical problem with that. However, on the question of power, I think it is a short-sighted view. I have personal experience of this. I was one of the people who was very keen to see the policy of putting power underground progress for the reason I have mentioned: it will address the heat sink effect. I saw it as a good investment by the State. The cheapest electricity is the electricity that is saved, not the electricity that requires extra capacity to be built to generate. Very seldom will we find that the saving of electricity costs more than the generation of electricity. When the policy came out, the general idea was that Western Power would pay one-third and the local government would pay one-third. The local government would then have the choice of whether to ask local people to pay the remaining third. In some places the local council paid two-thirds and Western Power paid one-third. In other places it was one-third, one-third, one-third. One of the prime places for development that fitted exactly was Mt Lawley. Mt Lawley falls in the City of Stirling. The City of Stirling is somewhat preoccupied with the newer suburbs, not the older suburbs. It has been a bit of a gripe from residents in the older suburbs that the City of Stirling does not know how to handle the older suburbs.

Hon Ken Travers: Even the young suburbs are getting a bit old these days.

Hon PETER FOSS: They are; that is very true. The interesting thing is that the City of Stirling rejected the idea even though it fitted the category. The issue went on for some time and, finally, seeing some benefit in it, it decided to join in. Mt Lawley started to get some underground power. Do members know where it stopped? The next street to mine! I feel rather aggrieved by the fact that, having been one of the people who pushed it, it stopped in the street next to mine.

Hon Ken Travers: You have never forgiven Colin Barnett to this day!

Hon PETER FOSS: It was nothing to do with Colin Barnett. It was not his fault; it was the City of Stirling. That is where I place the blame. The important thing is this: I suggest we should pay for it because that is the sort of thing that will happen. In any event, people pay for the cost of electricity from the front gate to the house, so they pay to some degree. If people are left to pay for undergrounding voluntarily, in many cases it will not happen. If the Government wants to make it compulsory and recover the money from people, good luck to it; I commend its bravery.

Hon Ken Travers: I do not expect to be able to convince my Government.

Hon PETER FOSS: I do not think Hon Ken Travers' Government would ever do that. We are talking about an unrealistic situation; namely, either something that will not happen in many places because people will not pay given that it is voluntary, or something that will be an impossibility because the Government wants to make it compulsory and force people to pay a third of the cost. I do not see any Government doing that, especially when the Government is saving money with the alternative position.

If the Government is happy to build a new base-load power station worth hundreds of millions of dollars yet substantial amounts of power can be saved by undergrounding the wires, why on earth would it expect the public to pay for one option as individuals and the public as a whole to pay for the other option? The reality is that we are talking about 400 000 cubic metres of greenhouse gases in Chicago. I do not know what the equivalent would be in Perth; it is one of the most spread out cities in the world.

Hon Ken Travers: Transportation costs in WA are higher than those of any place overseas.

Hon PETER FOSS: I would be very surprised if Western Australia produces less than Chicago produced 25 years ago. We are talking about major quantities of electricity. If we were prepared to build a power station that produced 400 000 cubic metres of greenhouse gases an hour, which would cost several hundred million dollars, it would be sensible public policy to adopt the alternative and save large quantities of power by undergrounding



Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

powerlines and growing trees. I am recommending that - I agree with Hon Ken Travers' logic - but it will not happen.

Hon Ken Travers: I am not saying that we should stop the current program.

Hon PETER FOSS: I am saying it should be doubled or trebled and the Government should pay for the lot; it would be money well invested.

Hon Ken Travers: The point I am making is that I would appeal to the good nature of people by emphasising that they are having an environmental impact and they should make a contribution to fix that impact. There is nothing wrong with the Government providing that sense of leadership and appealing to the highest common denominator rather than the lowest common denominator in people.

Hon PETER FOSS: Although I have considerable sympathy and probably agree with the logic of Hon Ken Travers' argument, it will not happen. I am saying that the State works on the basis of taxpayer-funded facilities because we know individuals will not pay. We could say to everybody that if they want a school, they can afford to pay for it because they will get the real benefit.

Hon Barbara Scott: Or railways.

Hon PETER FOSS: It might be somewhat more difficult to get them to pay for railways. It would be feasible with schools. What about a local health clinic or an oval? Why should the Government bother to provide ovals; why not ask people to buy some land that can be set aside as an oval?

Hon Ken Travers: Many schools were built without any government funding.

Hon PETER FOSS: Does Hon Ken Travers suggest we do that as a general policy? The reason that does not happen is that human nature means that half the communities would end up without a school. I am saying that we must be real.

Hon Ken Travers: I am an optimist.

Hon PETER FOSS: It is urgent. If we do not want to pay for a power station that produces 400 000 metres of greenhouse gas per hour, why not spend less money in saving the power that produces 400 000 cubic metres? What is so special about that? It would be good public expenditure if it saved the State money in the end, and saved borrowing to build another power station and to transmit the power. It would help meet the greenhouse gas targets that will be imposed on us. We say we should do these things. We are paying scientists to study them, and giving grants for people to come up with programs. We are spending all this money while right in front of us we have the means to reduce our consumption of electricity. Instead of spending money on this, that and the other thing, and trying to work out whether it will save power, right in front of us is a program that is already being carried out. If a little bit more money can be put into it to speed it and maybe make it a little more generous, this should be done for only one reason. It will happen sooner.

Hon Ken Travers: It will get to your street sooner.

Hon PETER FOSS: No; I do not even mind if my street is done last, as long as all the streets are done very quickly. The important thing about it is that it is a good thing to do. It is a good expenditure of government money, with a good result. It is a very effective way of dealing with the environment. We did not ask people to pay for infill sewerage. Has anybody queried that as being a good investment of money? No. Has anybody said that people whose land values are rising should pay for that sewerage work in their streets? That is probably the right thing to do, but if we had said that, how much would have been done by now? How much would have happened?

Hon Kim Chance: We had enough trouble getting people to connect to it once it was done.

Hon PETER FOSS: That is right; it would not have happened. I agree with Hon Ken Travers that the logic is inescapable, but it ain't gonna happen. We know that it could happen. I would see it as a good expense for the Government. I would support it very strongly, especially if it came to my street.

Hon Kim Chance: Even if it did not?

Hon PETER FOSS: I would still support it. I have supported it all along. I have been a firm advocate of this, and it never got to my street. Despite being the person saying we should do it, it never got to my street. It seems a little unfair that it never got to the street of the person who said we should do it.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Hon Peter Foss will have to be careful, or I will be offering him a membership form shortly! I want to contribute to the discussion about the mechanisms that we use to get people to do the right thing. The analogy with the infill sewerage program is a good one - there is an environmental benefit. One of the main arguments advanced about why the Government needed to subsidise and progress deep sewerage as

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

soon as possible was the impact on the Swan River, wetlands and our ground water supplies. The same argument can be mounted for undergrounding power. I am not opposed to this mechanism for making people do the right thing, but it is limited. I cannot say exactly where I read it, but during the past week I was comparing some figures about the uptake of so-called “green power” schemes, under which people are encouraged to pay a bit more for their electricity, and their extra contribution to their power bill is used to promote renewable energy. Western Australia has the lowest uptake of that scheme anywhere in Australia. We are promoting these mechanisms, which have their place, for people to do the right thing. It is a bit like suggesting that people do not use plastic bags in the shopping centre, when we know that putting a levy on plastic bags would send a much more rapid message to people and is totally legitimate in recognising the cost of plastic to the environment. What mechanisms are we using, and what messages are we sending about energy consumption? Encouraging people to do the right thing and pay more for their power has had a very low uptake, not least due to the fact that it has not been adequately promoted in Western Australia. Therefore, it is not surprising that quite a lot of us are very cynical about shifting the onus onto consumers and requiring them do the right thing, rather than recognising that the Government has a responsibility and a role to play in directing decisions about energy consumption.

While we are debating this issue of the Government not providing the money to underground power in the urban environment, we need to remember that at the same time the Government has been happy to provide a \$48 million subsidy from public funds for the establishment of a mine in Ravensthorpe. On the one hand the Government is happy to pump public money into a private company, but on the other hand it is not willing to do something that will have an effect on the overall energy consumption in the city. In saying that, I am referring to the arguments that have been put about the heat sink component of not having shade trees. That rather contradicts the suggestion that the Government should play a hands-off role and that those citizens who can afford to pay should be encouraged to do the right thing. I certainly agree that those who can afford to pay should be encouraged to contribute a larger proportion of the cost. However, that does not mean that the Government should not also play a role. The benefits are far reaching, as Hon Peter Foss said, because if we can reduce the demand for power we will also make savings by not having to build new power stations or find new sources of energy.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I will make my final comments on this matter! This debate is very interesting. I am not arguing that we should abandon the current government policy. My argument is that we should encourage the undergrounding of power to take place as quickly as possible. However, it comes down to who should bear the cost of that undergrounding. We should never forget that public money is not a massive pot of money that we can just dip into whenever we like. It belongs to the residents of Western Australia. In saying that the cost should be shared equally by all the residents of Western Australia, we need to remember that the people of the northern suburbs have already paid their fair share. When the people in Ocean Reef bought their blocks, they paid for their underground power. Why should their taxes then be used to pay for the undergrounding of power to my house in Mt Hawthorn? That is the point I am making. I believe that as politicians and leaders we sometimes need to make the tough decisions and have that debate with people. The easy answer is to say that the burden should be shared equally and everyone should pay for it, and to hope that because the people at Ocean Reef will not be able to quantify it in their electricity bill we can just subtly get them to make a contribution towards fixing the environmental problems that are being caused by my electricity supply in Mt Hawthorn. I will continue to show leadership and to articulate the view that I believe that obligation should be placed on me. I expect that people will, because of their vested self-interest, say that we should continue to make the people in Butler, Ocean Reef and Joondalup subsidise the impact that my electricity supply in Mt Hawthorn, for example, is having on the environment. I do not agree with that view. That does not mean that the Government will not continue to adopt the policy that it has adopted, but I for one am more than happy to articulate the view that the onus should be brought to bear on each of us. I should accept my responsibility, and my neighbours should accept their responsibility. We should not impose that cost on people who have already paid for their underground power. We should not expect the people in the outer northern suburbs to pay for the undergrounding of power in the inner northern suburbs.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: I have been sitting in silence listening with some interest to the debate and how it has progressed. I live in Swanbourne. On the opposite side of the road from my house is a row of Moreton Bay fig trees. If anybody dared cut those Moreton Bay fig trees down, I would probably protest. On my side of the road, however, the only trees are lamp posts. From lamp post to lamp post hang strings of ugly electric light wires. I would be happy to pay my share to have the power underground. Apart from anything else, it would enable me to plant a tree in my front courtyard, which I cannot do at the moment because the tree would grow into the electric power transmission lines and become all sorts of a nuisance. I cannot do that. The front of my house faces west, and I would like some shade on the part of my house that includes my study. For that reason I would love to have a tree. For that reason I would quite happily contribute to the cost of undergrounding the

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

power. However, I am also happy to contribute to the undergrounding of the power in the suburb of Rivervale - a good working-class suburb that I grew up in. I grew up in the so-called mad mile of Rivervale, a square mile of State Housing Commission houses built in 1948.

Hon Ken Travers: What road?

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: It was the corner of Armadale and Roberts Roads. I lived there between the ages of six and 21 years. I would be very happy to make my contribution through tax or a levy on my power bill to those people, because I think I am in a relatively privileged position financially. I do not think I am wealthy and I do not have a great deal of assets - in fact, I have debts that almost exceed my assets. However, for the time being I am on a reasonable income and my wife is on a reasonable income. I think we have a responsibility to contribute for those who are less well off in our community. However, if we followed Hon Ken Travers' argument, if I had bought a house in Swanbourne where, as would be possible, on one side was the site of the Lakeway Drive-in theatre, which will be urbanised, sell for probably \$600 000 a block and have all the power underground, or opposite there was the Swanbourne Senior High School redevelopment, with underground powered blocks -

Hon Ken Travers: Paid for by the owners.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Yes, without doubt it would be built into the development costs and therefore absorbed by the eventual buyer. I do not know that my position would change and that I would say that I would not contribute to the undergrounding of power at Rivervale simply because I had already paid for mine. It is like saying that if I pay to send my children to a private school, I should have a proportionate amount deducted from my tax levy, should I not; or, if I pay to have my child educated at a private school, I am not entitled to other people's contribution to my children's education by virtue of the tax that they pay. That argument is dead; it was settled in 1973 by the Labor Government. The Schools Commission, established by the federal Labor Government in 1973, made commonwealth contributions to non-government schools according to need. Some of those non-government schools - in those days they were non-systemic Catholic schools - received from the Commonwealth Government up to 69 per cent of the equivalent cost of educating a child at a government school. I will come back to that matter because the question of equity was raised by Hon Ken Travers and others, and I am contributing to the argument. Hon Ken Travers asked: what is our social responsibility for the equity of all citizens? Labor established that for schools in 1973, and I am making the point that it was established on the basis of need.

Hon Graham Giffard: John Howard -

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: In fact, John Howard has reinstated the very principle of the Carmel report of 1973. Hon Graham Giffard should read it and then compare it -

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! Hon Ken Travers will have a chance to give an example in a moment. I will hear one member at a time. I accept that what Hon Derrick Tomlinson is saying is relevant to underground policy; that is, it is a question of equity generally.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Yes. I will not pursue the point, Mr Chairman. I was deliberately provocative in choosing that issue, as it is one in which the parties have taken different positions.

My position is quite clear. There are some social institutions that we, as citizens, contribute to proportional to our capacity to pay, such as health and education. My family pays for health insurance three times. My wife pays at the top of the Medicare levy, I pay at the top of the Medicare levy and together we share the cost of private health insurance at the top of the scale. That is a choice I make because of my capacity to pay with the family's disposable income. I do not mind exercising that choice. I do not mind paying for hospitals. I do not mind paying for the health care of other citizens who are less able than I to pay for it themselves. I accept that as part of my responsibility as an Australian citizen. By the same token, there is a very real social and environmental value in the undergrounding of power. For example, we have had some interesting debates in my house on the relative value of trees versus airconditioning in maintaining a comfortable living design. However, in this debate I regard the undergrounding of power as a value of our community. It is a value to which we contribute according to our capacity to pay. If some of us have a disposable income that enables us to, we should pay for the private undergrounding of power. It is nonsense to argue that people who live in suburbs with underground power should not contribute to the cost of others.

Hon Ken Travers: They are having to double pay.

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[COUNCIL - Friday, 2 April 2004]  
p1646a-1657a

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Of course; just as I am paying double for health and just as I am paying double for education. I accept that because of the question of the capacity to pay. If people want to live in those suburbs, they have the advantage of having underground power; it is built in.

The CHAIRMAN: I give the call to Hon Ken Travers, who indicated that he wanted to comment on some of the issues raised during the debate. The parliamentary secretary must recognise that only 10 minutes is left to speak on this matter today and another member wants to speak on it.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I will be very brief.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: I deliberately waited until you said you would speak no more!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is right. I have realised my mistake; I should always wait until Hon Derrick Tomlinson has spoken before I speak.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: I will never trust you again.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am glad the member referred to Rivervale. It is an excellent example. The value of the property I owned doubled in the time I lived there.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Now you could not afford it.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is the issue about equity. Rivervale was a Homeswest suburb but people on a Homeswest scheme or a form of supporter purchase would not be able to purchase a property in Rivervale today. They would be able to purchase property in the Homeswest subdivisions, which, unfortunately, are on the fringes of metropolitan Perth. Those areas have underground power.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: I would strongly commend some sites in Rivervale to you. It is a good investment.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The property values in Rivervale for a standard housing block of 450 square metres is about \$150 000.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: That is one of the benefits of the freeway built by the previous Government.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Today, land there is now valued at about \$150 000. A person on a low income would not pay \$150 000 for land. They would purchase land on a subdivision in the outer fringes of metropolitan Perth for significantly less than that amount.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: They would have underground power.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: They would pay for their underground power. The problem with Hon Derrick Tomlinson's argument is that people on low incomes must pay once to get underground power to their homes and the member is asking them to make a second contribution so that people in Rivervale, who have bought more expensive blocks, can have their underground power subsidised. People who make an impact on the environment should pay for it. However, people on low incomes should not have to pay twice. This is not about people who earn high incomes, such as Hon Derrick Tomlinson; it is about the people on low incomes who live in the fringe suburbs.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Would you concede that I said "according to the person's capacity to pay"?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I accept that. However, the current system does not do that. To have equity, underground power should be subsidised in all the new subdivisions as well as the other areas. If it is to be done on a person's capacity to pay, that is how it should be done. It would then be done across the board. The system and the structure of the current funding mechanisms require people on low incomes to double-dip to subsidise me and my neighbours in a wealthy area and to subsidise people who live in Rivervale and who have experienced significant growth in their property values. People who buy into Rivervale today would pay significantly more than Hon Derrick Tomlinson's family paid when they lived there, and they would pay significantly more for their property than would people who live in outlying areas in which the residents have already paid for underground power. That is my point. That is not equitable and it is not based on a person's capacity to pay.

Hon PETER FOSS: I refer to three points Hon Ken Travers raised in his earlier speech. After I moved into my house, the council put high-tension transmission power lines in my street. Nowadays I would probably complain about it. However, in those days I thought that the power had to go somewhere and so I put up with it. For the general public good, I did not object to it. The transmission lines in my street are massive. That has had a major detrimental effect on the amenity of my street and on the value of my property. That is for the benefit of all people, yet I suffer from the environmental and amenity problems. Should I be compensated for that having happened after I bought my house and moved in? I paid for a house that did not have a transmission line. I now have a transmission line down my street that has reduced the value of my property and has reduced the amenity

Hon Norman Moore; Mr Tom Stephens; Hon Bill Stretch; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Peter Foss; Hon Giz Watson;  
Hon Ken Travers;; Hon Derrick Tomlinson; Chairman

---

of my street. Should I be compensated for that? That is the reverse side of the member's argument. If the parliamentary secretary's logic is right, I should be entitled to compensation.

Secondly, the transmission lines that we are talking about undergrounding are public lines. I am not the person who is causing the environmental problem; that is Western Power. It owns the lines that run down my street - they run along public property.

Hon Ken Travers: They bring power to you.

Hon PETER FOSS: It might bring power to me, but I would be quite happy for my trees to grow higher. I do not cut the trees; they are cut because that is Western Power's requirement. It uses public property on public land, and the State Energy Commission of Western Australia was the one that decided not to put in underground power. It set the standard; it was government that made that decision. If anybody is causing the problem, it is the Government. If we want to make the polluter pay, it is the Government as the polluter that should pay.

Thirdly, there is something we can do and pay for privately. When my wife and I moved into our house, we built a two-storey extension at the back of the house, which is where our bedroom is. After we built that extension, because of the direction it faced, my wife planted a Virginia creeper to grow up the wall and a liquid amber tree just across from the garden. It is now a huge tree. The wonderful thing is that in summer we can sit outside in the beautiful shade. If it is a 45 degree day, we can sit under that tree, where it is cool. We do not sit inside the house; we sit outside under the liquid amber. That shades the wall of our bedroom, and so does the Virginia creeper. In winter, all the leaves fall off the liquid amber tree and the Virginia creeper, and we then have the benefit of the sunshine. My wife planted those plants in 1982 for that particular purpose, and it works brilliantly. We have the best outdoor area in which to sit, and it saves electricity. It is a fantastic way to save electricity. All it takes is a little foresight. We did not have to spend much money. We paid for a little tree and a little plant, and the energy in the sun did the rest. That is the wonderful thing about using trees to keep things cool; it is a very minor capital expense, because the sun does all the other investment. The investment of the sun in that growing is what keeps us cool. It is the investment of the sun on bitumen roads that keeps us hot. We can argue about the merits for ages, but if we want it to happen, we must pay for it to happen. I have already given members one example. The City of Stirling would not provide underground power because of the cost. I am already paying more because I pay a lot more in rates than most people because I live in Mt Lawley. The thing is that it did not happen. I was prepared to pay; I was happy to pay the lot. However, if only one house in the street is prepared to pay for underground power, it cannot be done; it must be everybody. Therefore, the City of Stirling said that it would not do it. It was not prepared to pay the other one-third of the cost. I was very happy to pay. The fact is that it does not happen. To this day, my street and many other streets in Mt Lawley do not have underground power, and they should. I am saying that if we want something to happen, we must put a bit of money into it. It is very worthwhile. It will save the Government money; it will save taxpayers' money if we do it. The net economic cost will be a benefit, not a cost, to the State. To work out the cost, we need to work out the net economic cost after the environmental benefits have been worked out.

Question put and passed.