

## STREETLIGHTS - NORTHERN SUBURBS

### *Grievance*

**MR A.P. O'GORMAN (Joondalup)** [9.23 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Energy. I would also like to compliment the Minister for Energy on his attire this morning; he is not wearing the pyjama top shirt, so I thank the minister very much for that.

My grievance is what I term "the mushroom grievance". It is about the people in the northern suburbs; we are being kept in the dark and we are being fed a lot of what can be called "BS". The problem is that streetlights are out continually right across my electorate. In fact, I am receiving calls about not only my electorate but also other suburbs that immediately surround my electorate.

I probably will not take the full seven minutes for my grievance, because I will give the minister a list of streetlights that were out and have been reported to Western Power. Some of the streetlights have since been repaired, but members will notice as I go through the list the length of time it takes to have a replacement globe fitted. Indeed, it has been suggested to me that maybe I should stick a couple of globes in my pocket and shimmy up the pole and stick them in. However, I am not willing to do that. There is a demarcation line between politics -

**Mr F.M. Logan:** Does the member not have a restricted electrical licence?

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I do not have a restricted electrical licence. I tried to get one, but it was not happening at the time.

**Mr A.D. McRae:** Before the member for Joondalup goes through the list, the member for Victoria Park and I were just talking about how we are also receiving lots of reports.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I am not grieving on behalf of Joondalup; I am grieving on behalf of the whole metropolitan area!

Several members interjected.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Sorry, minister. This is a multi-pronged attack and I hope we have a multi-pronged answer to resolve these lighting issues. My office reported lighting issues to Western Power on 17 April, after previous reports by constituents to Western Power had no success in having light shed on the problem. In Cumberland Way, Beldon, the lights went out mid-March. The constituent who reported it was told in early April that it could take another three or four weeks to repair it. He is definitely not happy about that. The work order he was given was TC6748164. Those lights in Cumberland Way finally got fixed on 9 May - from March! Minister, that is just not acceptable.

Another issue my office reported to Western Power on 17 April was in Awhina Place, Kallaroo. The lights in the cul-de-sac have been out since late March and the constituent reported it to Western Power in Early April. The lights at the end of the cul-de-sac are out near a public access way. He is claiming that crime has increased since the streetlights went out and that the perpetrators are managing to escape by that darkened public access way. The residents have had more break-ins to their homes and cars in the street. My constituent has also informed me that a lot of elderly people in the street are feeling very vulnerable and anxious because of the lack of lighting. He was given work order TC1252248.

This grievance was prepared for the minister last week, but unfortunately he was overseas-

**Mr F.M. Logan** interjected.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Doing his job. The lights in Awhina Place were also fixed on 9 May. Another problem also reported on 17 April, was at the corner of Silkeborg and Pedder Place. This is a very important one. It is right at the end of my street. I reported that incident myself, and that also took a lot of time to be repaired. In February, a constituent reported to my office that lights in Korella Street were not working. There are probably about 10 streets in Mullaloo with lighting problems: Korella Street, Gunida Street, Yulema Street, Page Drive, Marjorie Street, David Street, and Oceanside Promenade between Marjorie and Korella streets. All have streetlights that are not working. When this constituent reported this incident to Western Power, the constituent was told the wait would be months, because of a backlog due to a change of contractor. Once we got onto Western Power, we managed to get some action on that. I do not think that it is good enough that constituents have to get on to their local member to get some light shed in their streets. More recently, this was not reported directly to my office, but we picked up an article in the local newspaper headlined "Weeks in dark and counting...", which reads -

Let's make a list. How many more suburbs can we name without street lights?

We have had Heathridge, Connolly (now fixed) - Marmion, and now I am adding Beldon.

We have been without lights for over three weeks, the usual phone calls, job numbers, calls to council, where my husband was told to try our local MP.

Therefore, our local council is sending them back to me. I continue -

I hope the Mayor of Joondalup follows the Mayor of Fremantle and refuses to pay the Western Power bill, and maybe, just maybe, reduce our rates for services we do not get.

That was in our local newspaper on 24 April.

We also received a call - as I said, I am starting to receive calls from outside my electorate - from a resident in Tarcoola Retreat, Ocean Reef, where the lights have been out for eight weeks. I therefore ask the minister to take the people from Western Power, give them a good swift kick where they need it, get them back out on their ladders, cherry pickers or whatever it takes to get them up to the lights, and have them screw in a couple of bulbs so that people will be safe in their homes and safe walking around the streets at night.

**Ms K. Hodson-Thomas:** You are in big trouble!

**MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn - Minister for Energy)** [9.30 am]: I thank members for that unanimous vote of confidence in Western Power!

I thank the member for Joondalup for presenting this grievance. It is an issue, obviously I am aware of it, and I will give him the reasons, as provided to me by Western Power, that it has become an issue. As the member knows, Western Power is responsible to councils - I think under contract in many cases - for maintaining and repairing streetlights, unless they are controlled by Main Roads, are privately owned, are on private property or are on non-gazetted roads. That means that Western Power is responsible for approximately 207 000 streetlights in the south west interconnected system. The organisation that was contracted by Western Power to maintain streetlights was a company called Safeline. That company was disengaged in late 2006.

**Mr A.J. Simpson:** Why, minister?

**Mr F.M. LOGAN:** I am just coming to that.

The company was disengaged, according to Western Power, for not meeting Western Power's standards for quality, particularly for maintaining inadequate documentation on quality standards and procedures. Western Power then issued the contract through a preferred-vendor arrangement and the contract for the repair of streetlights was awarded to Alinta under that preferred-vendor arrangement. I believe Alinta commenced work on streetlight repairs in December 2006. Western Power introduced Safeline to Alinta to allow Alinta to work with Safeline, to learn its procedures, engage some of its workforce and continue with the work that had been done before by Safeline. However, I am aware that Safeline then received further work from a different industry, the construction industry, and therefore a significant proportion of its workforce went off to work in the construction industry, leaving Alinta with a very small component of Safeline's workforce. Alinta then took on a significant number of its own crews, and had three crews available. Unfortunately, with a smaller workforce than Safeline had in the first place, Alinta simply got behind in the number of streetlights that were being repaired. As members know, streetlights do go out quite regularly; there are 207 000 of them. The bulbs fail quite regularly and if the company is not on top of the repairs, the backlog builds up. If the company does not have the workforce to repair them, the backlog will build up very quickly indeed, and that is exactly what has occurred. I am particularly disappointed about it, but this is what Western Power has informed me it intends to do about it -

it will investigate the following options to improve the performance in the short term;

it will further engage with Alinta to encourage additional increases in its resources for streetlight repair;

an additional six Alinta people - that is, three crews - will be trained over two weeks, and it is expected that they will be able to commence work no sooner than in three weeks, with the exact start date being subject to the availability of supporting equipment which is currently being sourced;

the longer-term view is that Alinta will resource up to seven crews, resulting in 10 crews overall being available, including three subcontract crews;

it will redirect internal Western Power crews themselves to assist in streetlight repair; and

it will engage with a company currently employed by Western Power for non-streetlight work, but which provides streetlight repair services in the eastern states.

That company will therefore be brought into play, and I believe also that Western Power has engaged a company from New Zealand that provides streetlight repair services in New Zealand to also address the backlog and meet the need. I inform the member for Joondalup that I was told by one of the policy officers who works for Western Power that a person repairing a streetlight must have the qualifications of a linesman.

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman** interjected.

**Mr F.M. LOGAN:** I know. As the member for Joondalup well knows, there is literally a global shortage of linesmen currently, and it takes a significant time to train them. Why Western Power needs a linesman to replace a bulb is beyond me. That is one of the issues that I will take up with not only Western Power but also EnergySafety to see whether we can actually find a different level of training simply for the replacement of bulbs.

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman** interjected.

**Mr F.M. LOGAN:** Yes, exactly; likewise.

So that is one of the issues. I will express my concerns about these issues in writing to the chief executive officer of Western Power, Doug Aberle. I will also arrange a meeting with him personally and take up these issues with him directly. I will use *Hansard* to pick up the issues that the member for Joondalup has raised with me today to ensure that Mr Aberle is aware of the specific items that the member has raised. However, from the comments that have come from both sides of the house today, it is obvious that this issue is affecting a significant number of suburbs and that is totally unacceptable. Why Western Power has got itself into this mess simply by changing contractors is beyond me; that is the issue I really want to get to the bottom of. Western Power has indicated to me that to address the longer term, Western Power is looking to move away from the preferred-vendor contracting process and go to an open-contracting process and put the contract out in the market to attract a far greater level of performance from contractors who would then competitively bid for that longer-term contract for the replacement and repair of streetlights. With those issues that I have highlighted in mind and the way in which Western Power will address them in the short and longer terms, I hope we will not get ourselves into this situation again.