

CYCLONE SEROJA — WATER CORPORATION — ESSENTIAL SERVICES

20. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Water:

I refer to ex-tropical cyclone Seroja that has impacted essential services in my local community of Geraldton, as well as Kalbarri and the surrounding areas.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the work underway by the state government to reconnect essential water services in those affected communities?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how the state government is supporting those affected by this disaster?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Geraldton for her question and for the very hard work she has been putting in in recent weeks to assist her community. As a state government, Madam Speaker—congratulations on your election; I am sure you are going to get sick of that eventually, but we will keep saying it until you give us the nod!

The SPEAKER: I am not sick of it yet!

Mr D.J. KELLY: We have been working extremely hard to assist the people of the midwest who have been impacted by ex-cyclone Seroja. I am very proud of the work that has been done by staff at the Water Corporation to ensure that essential water services have continued to be provided. There are only 70 Water Corporation staff in the midwest. That may sound like a lot, but when we think that the area impacted by ex-cyclone Seroja is equivalent to the area of Tasmania, it really is a vast task. The Water Corporation has charge of thousands of kilometres of pipes, over 200 pumps, tanks and other bits of infrastructure in that area, so when cyclone Seroja hit and communications went out and, importantly, power went out, it really was an enormous task that those staff faced. Obviously, the loss of power and communication meant that effectively those staff were operating blind. They could not communicate with each other, they could not communicate with other emergency services and it was a significant task. I really want to congratulate the corporation for the work it put in. Seventy staff got straight to work, and their efforts were supplemented by another 30 staff who, within 24 hours, were mobilised from the metropolitan area. They put together something like 60 temporary generation sets to ensure that power was resupplied on a temporary basis to the system before Western Power was able to reconnect supply on a permanent basis. By and large, the Water Corporation's own infrastructure survived pretty well, apart from some damage in Kalbarri. Once the temporary power was connected, and the priorities of wastewater and drinking water were secured, the Water Corporation's efforts were then directed to the non-potable services that are provided. The Mingenew service, with 200 kilometres of pipe, provides non-potable services to a number of farms in that area. Again, it was done by cooperating and working. I think, in particular, Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd assisted. Water Corporation managed to source some generation sets from CBH, so emergency water supplies for livestock were able to be provided. Very quickly, the Water Corporation staff ensured that essential services were provided.

We then announced a range of relief packages for commercial and residential customers, and that was quite significant. All customers in Kalbarri and Northampton had outstanding debts and charges waived. It was something like 447 customers, and over \$277 000 worth of debts were waived. In addition, service charges for 12 months, totalling over \$2.2 million, have been waived for any residential customer in Kalbarri and Northampton. In addition to that, they are getting 50 kilolitres of free water. Outside Kalbarri and Northampton, if customers have been affected by the cyclone, they are able to apply, and if they have lost their homes, they will get the same support package as residents in Kalbarri and Northampton. Outside of Kalbarri and Northampton, impacted businesses will have their wastewater service charges waived for four months. Again, that is significant financial assistance for those businesses. I understand that about 120 customers outside Kalbarri and Northampton have taken advantage of that. In total, we estimate that the package will be about \$5 million worth of financial relief for both commercial and residential customers.

As a government, we are doing everything we can so that those communities in the midwest can get back on their feet. I want to express my thanks on behalf of the people of Western Australia for the really hard work that the staff at the Water Corporation have done to play their part in getting those essential services and customer services back online as soon as possible.

The SPEAKER: Minister, that was very important information that I am glad you passed on to people, but your answer was rather long. I would ask you to be a bit briefer in future.