

WESTERN POWER — OUTAGES — REVIEW

Motion

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government's failure to properly maintain state-owned electricity networks, leading to major blackouts across Western Australia and inflicting hardship and financial loss on thousands of Western Australians.

I bring this motion to the house because the McGowan Labor government has not properly maintained and improved the state's electricity network, neither has it properly tackled the issues of power outages that are being inflicted upon families, households and businesses across our state. We continue to ask questions; we continue to raise concerns about these outages under the Minister for Energy, especially about the repetition of blackouts throughout Western Australia. After two elections and five years under this government, and three years of this minister, the final report of the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* was delivered by the minister today. The Shepherd inquiry reveals that over Christmas to New Year's Eve 2021, power outages impacted 107 000 Western Power customers, who suffered through blackouts, including 26 000 people being without power for 12 hours or longer and 40 000 people experiencing repeated blackouts. I might say the issue of repeated blackouts is a major concern outside the headline statistics.

Those Christmas to New Year's Eve blackouts were extensive. They covered the whole of the Perth metropolitan area out to the surrounding peri-urban hills districts and regionally as far as Kalbarri, Northampton, Chapman Valley, Geraldton in the midwest, Kalgoorlie in the goldfields, Gingin, Mandurah, Murray, Capel in the Peel and Katanning in the great southern. I bring this motion to criticise the Labor government and the Minister for Energy, because after two elections and five years in office, this government acknowledges only now that a problem exists, let alone that it has not done anything noteworthy to significantly improve our power network.

We all know that minor outages are inevitable. The minister made a great point about this when he talked about the many, many connections in the network and the distance of the network and the like. We know that from time to time there will be some failures in the system. We also know that sometimes there will be unusual events—unusual storms and bushfires—that will impact the network. I note that the minister likes to constantly claim that it is due to climate change and the like, as though somehow warm weather is something unusual in our system. But, of course, we know that the system was built to withstand that. Whether there are five hot days or 10 hot days, it should be no different on any given day. We expect the network to cope under those conditions. It should be able to do that. In metropolitan Perth, it largely does. I do not think that I can recall the last time there was a power outage in my suburb, and I think that that is true for most inner-city suburbs.

We hear a multitude of excuses for this.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not taking interjections, thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Member for Swan Hills, you heard the member for Cottesloe.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: For goodness sake!

We remind the minister that the recurring problems, particularly in rural and regional areas, are evidence of his failure. His three years in the job have been characterised by excuses and insufficient action. The minister comes in and says, "Things weren't right before. Things should have improved by now. I have been here for three years, but only just now as the result of an external report have I realised that there are major issues that need to be fixed." I point out that the issues that apparently were contributors to outages over Christmas and new year, which the minister had to be aware of, were not resolved before this report came out.

Members will all be reminded of the dislocation, disruption and cost borne by households and businesses that have suffered from unacceptable substandard power supply systems. The experience of our communities is the evidence of the failure of the government to improve those systems. The government has been in office, as I said, for five years and this minister has been in office for three years, yet there has been insufficient emphasis on improving power supply reliability. In fact, it would seem that the minister turned a blind eye to the woes of the people in communities that are subject to regular disruptions to their electricity supply.

I am fascinated that the minister had to have an independent review into this. Every time we raise an issue about law and order, electricity or some other agency, the go-to response of the relevant minister is, "You're attacking the police. You're attacking Western Power workers. You're attacking the people in those departments." I make it clear:

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

I have said in this chamber a number of times in relation to law and order that I have the greatest respect for the police. I worked very closely with the police for six and a half years in my career as a forensic scientist; I have great respect for them. But I do not have the same respect for the Minister for Police, who is not doing his job. I have great respect for the workers of Western Power—the linespeople who are out there in all conditions repairing equipment. Anybody who knows anything about electricity—there are some members in this place who do—especially high-voltage electricity, will know that it is enormously complex work and that enormous hazards are associated with it. People do not intuitively understand the energy in high-voltage power networks, but the people who work with it do, and they know it is enormously complex to do that work in a safe and efficient manner. I have great respect for them. But I do not have the same level of respect for the work that the minister has done during his tenure and this government has done during its tenure to improve the reliability of our network.

I am concerned about this whole process. Some members know that I have had a significant industrial career. I hope I do not see come out of this report an excuse for the government to significantly increase charges for customers. Outside the \$500 rebate, which was announced just before the election and clearly an enticement—a payment for voters to vote for the Labor Party and not a sensible allocation of government money where it is required —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, the member has indicated that he is not taking interjections. He is a bit sensitive to criticism, I think.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I have a lot to get through today.

As I said in relation to the RATs that the government is handing out to billionaires for free, it should target its money to the people in need.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Exactly. I am in favour of that. I fully support that. The government is spraying money around to every single person in the community who does not need it.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I agree with the member. The government did not do much for the homeless, people on the streets and those couch surfing, but that money would have been very welcome to people on low incomes and low fixed incomes. I support that. I have said that many times. I do not believe that spraying money around to every single household in Western Australia was an appropriate use of government money. That sort of largesse should be reserved for people in need. I will always champion that.

As I have said, we have already seen power charges increase, outside of the \$500 rebate. I hope that this report is not some ruse or excuse of the government to increase power charges. I have some significant industrial experience in heavy industry. One of the things that I can say is that in every situation I have been in, the answer has never been spending a whole lot more money; it has been the efficient use of that money. The minister can have a direct impact on that in his own department.

In any case, I remind the minister and the Parliament of some of the power outages encountered by our citizens, especially those in rural areas. I have said this in this place before. For people living in regional Western Australia, power outages are almost the norm. Nearly every farm and business has to have its own backup generator because the power supply cannot be relied upon. If they have cold storage or critical manufacturing, they have to have their own backup. I was contacted by a business owner in Horrocks. Due to the regular power supply disruptions, that business was forced to spend \$30 000 on generator hire because the power system is not reliable enough. That business probably spent about five times as much to hire the generator as it did on the power supply, but due to its unreliability, it has to make that investment. That is a measure of the unreliability of the system.

The residents of Horrocks kept a record of power supply outages. They recorded over 117 hours of outages in the two months of December and January. Imagine that is somebody's house, and that is where they have a supply of food. Some people rely on medications being kept cold. Imagine the disruption to people's lives. Imagine coping with that. Western Power eventually delivered some generators to Horrocks at the end of January. Do any members in this place think that is acceptable? It seems to me that there has been a tolerance of these outages by this minister and this government. That is certainly what we saw in that case. I recall the power outages that occurred last Christmas. We heard in Parliament about the people in Roleystone enduring four days without power, beginning on Christmas Day. That came in the wake of intermittent disruptions during late November and early December. Members might think that was an unusual season. I vividly remember attending a public meeting with that community in Roleystone before the last state election. The people from that community experienced the same outages. I also recall the minister answering a grievance or a question in this chamber and saying that he was going to fix the problems and he was going to deal with it. The minister was going to fix the problems.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not going to play this stupid game. The minister was going to fix the problem in Roleystone. Does he deny that he said he was going to fix the problem in Roleystone? Does he deny it?

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Good on you, minister; you deny it.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, you have said that you will not invite interjections, yet you are being particularly provocative. It is one or the other.

Dr D.J. HONEY: As I said, I vividly remember the minister making statements that he was going to improve the power situation in Roleystone. What happened? We saw exactly the same faults repeated a year later. He had a warning about that. He knew that there were faults in that system. Those faults were not repaired. Those faults were not picked up.

Mr W.J. Johnston: You're a liar.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I beg your pardon?

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.S. LOVE: Madam Acting Speaker, the member for Cannington, the Minister for Energy, has just made an unparliamentary remark and called the member for Cottesloe a liar. I ask that you call for him to withdraw that remark.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Minister.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

As I said, over a year ago I was in Roleystone. The people of Roleystone had exactly the same problems a year later. The Christmas power outage was costlier and more disruptive as many people lost all their Christmas and New Year's Eve food. This important holiday—for many, it is an important religious holiday event—was ruined. It was also hot and people could not use the air conditioning.

I note that a couple of hours ago, the government announced that it has increased compensation for people who have power outages from \$80 to \$120. Over that Christmas–new year period, the government offered to double the compensation payable to \$160. Some of those families lost \$1 500 worth of food or more. They had multiple people coming to their houses. The member for Swan Hills would probably know that many of those people who live on rural blocks have big Christmas functions because they have the space. Their whole families are in those areas and in those communities. Many of them have a New Year's Eve celebration and a Christmas celebration at the same place. Not only did the power outages completely destroy those families' Christmas events as all the food that required refrigeration was ruined and, obviously, they could not have cold drinks and the like, but also the compensation was paltry. I understand the nature of short outages, but when we have these extreme outages, we need a review of the compensation. That is a separate matter, but it is an important matter.

Going back to May last year, we had the unacceptable situation of 38 Homeswest units in North Fremantle being without power for four days due to a pole collapsing.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister going to listen to my speech? The incident happened —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, you will have time to respond.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The incident happened on a Sunday morning. The power was finally restored on Wednesday evening. That period coincided with some extremely cold nights, with a minimum of only 5.4 degrees on the Tuesday—the coldest night of the year to that point. The minister raised the point about a private pole. I will talk about this so that he can be satisfied that I covered it fully. We can just imagine the situation of those residents, some of whom are elderly and frail, being left without power for four days. It was a Homeswest facility. There was buck-passing between Homeswest and Western Power. By no means was it clear that one or the other was primarily responsible for that delay, but because of that buck-passing between those two bodies, it was a government failure, whichever way we look at it, and that government failure left those residents without power for four days.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

My colleague the member for Moore has raised many examples of unacceptable power outage problems in rural areas, particularly in the midwest. In Dongara, business owners have incurred considerable cost due to regular power outages over recent years and especially so this past summer. One business owner told of the cost involved in buying solar panels and a backup generator. In addition, the same business lost insurance cover for power loss after making a significant claim in the past due to an extended power outage. I suspect that issue would affect many people in rural communities. People have been forced to buy their own generators despite being connected to a power supply.

We have been told of problems faced by the residents of Springfield who cannot even access water when their power is out. I followed that area on the map and it seems to suffer repeated power outages that are not resolved. When that matter was raised in Parliament, the minister essentially just brushed it off with several reasons, including, of course, his favourite of climate change. Regardless of whether the climate is changing—I accept the climate is changing, as I always have—it is Western Power's job is to supply power. That means if situations and conditions are changing and there is more load or pressure on the system, the government's job is to improve that system. It is Western Power's job to ensure that continual power is supplied. People have power supplies delivered to them in many of parts of the world where the temperatures are much more extreme than they are here. It is only a technical issue. There is nothing intrinsic to say that if it is a 40-degree day, we should not have electricity.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: As I said, we can talk about that change, but that is the job of Western Power. Its job is to deal with the conditions that we experience. As I said, from a technical point of view, whether we have three days over 40 degrees or five days over 40 degrees, that equipment has to cope with 40 degrees on a daily basis. It is not as though there is a cumulative impact of having those hotter days.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am sure the member for Swan Hills will have her chance to respond. When she responds, I am sure she will love to enlighten me. I would love the member to enlighten me on why a system that cannot cope with hot weather for two days cannot cope with hot weather for five days.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: As I said, the member will have her chance, and I will be fascinated to hear her extensive technical knowledge.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, you are just encouraging him.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Dr D.J. HONEY: As I said, the members on that side will have their turn to explain themselves, and I will be fascinated to hear those answers.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I call you to order for the first time.

Point of Order

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): I have called her to order. Is there something else you would like to say?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Under standing order 96, interruptions —

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have called her to order. Is there anything else you would like me to do, member? Member for Swan Hills—first time. Member for Cottesloe.

Debate Resumed

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. As always, I am grateful for your protection.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Do not push it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The residents at Walkaway told us they had six outages from Christmas to February last year, lasting a total of 76 hours, and businesses in the area suffered considerable losses, but at that stage they could claim only \$80 compensation. As I said, I note the minister doubled that for those houses that were affected over the specific Christmas–new year outage, but that obviously does not cover all those.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

Port Gregory suffered more than 160 hours of outages in that period, and it did not even get any power generator support from Western Power. Pioneer Lodge, an independent living unit in Northampton, is looking at having to spend \$70 000 for a generator to ensure that residents—of course, we can imagine in a facility like that just how important it is that we have continuous power—do not suffer during power outages. In Dongara, a doctor's practice had to dispose of hundreds of doses of COVID vaccine. It has an emergency backup power for refrigerators that goes for eight hours, which we would think is very prudent, but given the duration of the outages, that was not sufficient. Those examples are just some of the residents and the businesses that we talked about that were affected by that situation.

The Economic Regulation Authority's *Annual data report 2020/21: Energy distributors* shows that the reliability of our network is not improving and, in a number of cases, is deteriorating. If we look at "Extended interruptions" on page 4 of the report, we see the number of extended interruptions, which are interruptions that exceed 12 hours, for Western Power. When the government came into power, where were we at? We were down at about 50 000, I think it was. We went up to 70 000 in 2017–18. It dropped in 2018–19 and then it was 95 000 in 2019–20 and 70 000 this year. We have seen a substantial increase in the number of extended outages during the time that this government has been in power.

The ERA report shows the number of customers affected. It was 45 000 in 2016–17 and it went up to 98 000 and then over 70 000. That is 55 per cent higher than when the government came into power. Despite that troubling report, we did not hear any public comment from the minister about that substantial increase or what action he would take in response to an obvious problem. As I said, those numbers refer to interruptions of more than 12 hours. That is a considerable duration. But how many more were affected by outages that went for less than 12 hours? I will seek information from the minister about other durations, because I heard that over the Christmas period a number of people did not qualify for any compensation, despite the fact that they had numerous outages. The outages would last four hours, six hours, eight hours, 11 hours or whatever, and the power would come back on for a short time and then it would go off. In fact, I had reports from households that the repeated cycling of the power on and off destroyed equipment. Modern, more digitally based equipment can often be destroyed.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, it is. The 12 hours is really the tip of the iceberg in terms of the impact on households. But, as I said, how many were affected by shorter outages? I appreciate that 12 hours is the standard that is used. I am sure the minister can educate me, but I suspect —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: You know, minister, I am never too proud to learn.

A member interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am never too proud to learn and always grateful to be educated. Imagine going without power for 12 hours and the kids are trying to do their homework and the like. We saw in the report that the number of minor outages was much, much higher than that.

The ERA report under the graph on page 4 mentions that Western Power attributed the higher number of extended interruptions to storms. However, I point out that we have storms every year, just as we have hot weather every year. I do not accept that that has to be a reason. We must have a power network that is improved. We will see it demonstrated in some statistics that I will discuss later, but we consistently see the minister come in and say that, yes, we have this system and the Liberals were hopeless because they did not put sufficient money into it, yet what substantive improvement have we seen in the network under this government and this minister? He and the government recognised there were these problems. What have they done? Saying that they have put so much money into it is not doing anything. I have said this a number of times in this place. I get extremely frustrated whenever I hear that excuse in this place.

We have a range of standards around the state. If a person lives in the Perth CBD, nine extended outages a year is the accepted standard. That is almost a monthly disruption to the power system. Fortunately, fewer than 4 000 customers experienced an outage that lasted for more than nine hours. In rural areas, the acceptable standard is 16 interruptions a month. Tough luck if you live in the bush, members. What is acceptable in the city is just a fraction of what is acceptable in the bush. I have already discussed those statistics. As I have said, the feedback that we have received from regional communities is that using a standard of 12 hours simply hides the real problem; that is, they endure multiple outages, whether they hit the 12-hour limit or not. They cannot rely on the power network. We might think 16 outages is just a number. That means that more than one outage monthly is considered acceptable.

In the CBD, the standard for the acceptable duration of outages is 30 minutes, in Perth it is 160 minutes, and in rural areas it is 290 minutes, or nearly five hours. That seems to be an acceptable duration for an outage. I imagine that if that outage was for a planned activity, we might find that acceptable, but most of the outages are not for

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

that reason. It is interesting to note that there is a substantial difference between the CBD and Perth suburbs, but I will not dwell on that difference. Let us compare the performance with those standards. Again, if we look at the Economic Regulation Authority report that I have referenced, in the CBD the average duration of interruptions was 80 minutes. That is more than double the 30-minute standard. If we look at those suburbs that have the lower standard of 160 minutes, the average is 300 minutes, which is almost double the standard outage duration. For rural areas, the standard average outage duration is 290 minutes, or nearly five hours. The result last year was 1 700 minutes, or nearly 29 hours. That is nearly six times longer than the standard.

Last year, we had the impact of cyclone Seroja. I am sure the Minister for Energy will say that was the reason for those outages. If we look at the situation without the impact of cyclone Seroja, the recorded average number of outages was nearly 1 400 minutes a year, or nearly four times higher than the standard. The ERA report makes the comment —

Western Power has not met the ... standard of 160 minutes for urban areas in any of the six years reported.

Again, I am sure members opposite will leap onto that and say, “Hang on! You guys were in power for a year of that time.” The minister says that he recognises that there are problems, and he is doing a better job than the Liberal government ever did. The question I ask is: What has improved? What has changed? What has this minister done to improve reliability? Five years in, I guess for a bit of fun the minister could point to the previous government. But that is no solution for the people in the communities who are enduring those power outages and all the suffering that comes with them.

If we look at the latest Western Power *State of the infrastructure report* that we could get, it is pleasing to see that some things have improved. The number of unassisted wood pole failures has reduced from 305 to 188. That is a good improvement. However, the incidence of ground fires has increased from 114 to 186. What I am most concerned about is that the government is saying it is making major investments and pouring money into the electricity network. If we look at the age profile of distribution poles, essentially there has been no improvement at all. I will hold this up for members. The largest bar on that graph is for poles with an age of over 41 years. There has been no improvement in that particular area. If we look at the leakage current resulting in unassisted pole-top fires, we see that in 2015–16, it was 138, and in 2019–20, it was 498. That is a massive deterioration in the quality of those poles and cause of those fires. There has been a good improvement with some of the structural failures, which is pleasing to see.

If we look at the age profile of overhead distribution conductors, there is a substantial increase in the number that are over the age of 51 years. If we look at the age profile of pole-top switch disconnectors, there has again been a substantial increase in the number that are over the age of 31 years, although not quite as dramatic as for the previous one. If we read that report, yes, there are some improvements in some areas, but, overall, there is no consistent significant improvement in that network. That is a substantial contributor to the issues that we are seeing in this state.

Western Power is spending significant sums, yet our system’s performance is not improving. What is the issue here? Again, I come to the crunch. I have heard a number of ministers say, “Oh, well, I gave them the money; therefore, I did my job and everything is okay.” That completely misunderstands the role of the minister. It is not good enough for a minister to say, “Yes, I just handed over the dough”, or, “I gave the police the extra people they want, and everything else from that point on is their fault.”

Western Power’s revenue last year was about \$1.8 billion. It had a capital works budget of about \$800 million. Substantial amounts of money are being spent, yet we are not seeing a significant improvement. In 2020–21, there was \$760 million for capital investment, and there was a \$145 million underspend from the planned \$891 million capital budget. Imagine what that \$145 million could have done to improve the network. We will not talk about suppliers. In addition, the capital works underspend of \$145 million could have been allocated to upgrading and reducing the age of some of those systems and improving the capacity of the network for switching and the like.

If we also consider the fact that in 2021, the government did not require the payment from Western Power of a dividend of approximately \$300 million, Western Power had the capacity to spend some \$450 million on improving that system. However, we do not see the improvement that is needed to make the system more reliable.

The Shepherd review tells us that in the last five years, Western Power has spent \$368 million less on distribution network asset investment. That is the quote in that report. Again, that is money that could have been spent on capital improvement of the network so that it will be less susceptible to storms and to heat and thus less susceptible to outages.

Where is the focus from the minister to direct this? I said this after the Christmas outages. The minister was complaining. He said that the ERA and the Australian Energy Market Operator were the reason that Western Power could not spend money, because it was constrained within approved limits. I pointed out to the minister at the time, first, that the minister can give written direction to Western Power to spend money on specific activities. It just means that it cannot claim it back. Second, the minister can also write to the AEMO, as the previous Minister for Energy

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

did, and ask it to allow a greater spend on maintenance of assets. It is pleasing that the minister has subsequently made some requests in that regard, but that could have been done a long time ago rather than waiting until we had the very public outages over the Christmas–new year period.

It is no surprise that I have not had the opportunity to go through the review in detail, given that the minister only released the report today, but, clearly, I will. One of the reasons given in the review is the bushfire protocols that are applied. For example, when there was a fire ban situation, crews were not allowed to go into the areas to do repairs on lines or reinitiate lines and that was one of the things that extended the duration of the outages. We have known about that. The minister must have known about that as a constraint on the system; indeed, he must have known about that shortly after he came to the role of Minister for Energy. I was certainly told about it very shortly after I came to the role of shadow Minister for Energy. That situation could have been resolved with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, local fire brigades and Western Power working together. It is my understanding that no other state applies such a strict protocol—they have reasonable protocols. Now that the Shepherd report has come in, the minister says, “Oh, well. Now we’ll do something about it.” The minister knew about this; why did he not do something about it?

One of the things we hear from the Labor Party—not so much now, but we certainly heard it before and after the election—is that the Premier will have gold-standard transparency in Western Australia. I wrote to the minister on 13 January. I said, “Minister, can I please have a briefing with Western Power on the summer outages?” As the shadow minister, that is something that I am, obviously, very interested in. It is my belief that there has always been sufficient expertise in Western Power to understand the problems. The minister could have dealt with that without the need for an independent inquiry; still, he chose to go down that path. I requested a briefing. My office followed that up with the minister’s office on 2 February. Here we are in mid-March, more than two months later, and I have not had a single reply from the minister. It is a reasonable request that the opposition get a briefing. I will say that the Minister for Transport is a pretty fierce warrior but when I ask the Minister for Transport for briefings, the Minister for Transport gives me briefings. My request has gone to the Minister for Energy. I have sent a formal letter sent to his office twice and there has still been no briefing. That is unsatisfactory. That is not gold-standard transparency from his office.

As I said, I have covered the issue of the time it takes for repairs. The truth is that the issue of fire bans affecting the recovery or the restart of lines is a matter that could have been dealt with when the minister came to the portfolio. If I had been told that this was a problem when I came into my shadow role, the minister, with his many departmental and ministerial advisers and direct connection to Western Power and the other agencies, must have known about it. I do not see any reason for the minister to wait for Western Power to suddenly come up with a plan. I think the minister should be directing Western Power in that regard, which he can do, to resolve that issue straightaway so that we do not see that problem during the remainder of the year.

There are real human impacts from the outages. As I have pointed out here, the minister loves to pick up on a fine difference in the definition of a particular word or some such thing and that is his big “gotcha” moment, but the reality is that an objective analysis of the Western Australian electricity network shows no significant net improvement in the system. There have been improvements in some areas, but in a number of important areas, there has been significant deterioration. Under this government, we have consistently seen people experience more and longer outages and that is because the government has not done its job.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.44 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Liberal Party —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government’s failure to properly maintain state-owned electricity networks leading to major blackouts across WA and inflicting hardship and financial loss for thousands of Western Australians.

I will start by reflecting on a conversation I had in my electorate last week and then I will talk about something that is linked to this issue of maintenance and that is the opportunity for regional Western Australians, particularly when it comes to being able to connect the grid and how that is an inhibitor to growth.

I note the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages*, which was handed down today. I confess that I have not had a chance to read it in-depth just yet—we have had question time and a couple of other things in between the private member’s business that we are dealing with right now—but I did note that there was a particular recommendation about microgrids and that we need to look at doing things more innovatively, particularly in regional communities. It is a very timely debate for us to be having because last week I was in the community of Bencubbin, which is in the Shire of Mt Marshall, and also Mukinbudin. They are part of a group called the North Eastern Wheatbelt Region of Councils, which is a voluntary local government organisation of councils. It encompasses the communities of Dowerin, Koorda, Mt Marshall—which is Bencubbin and Beacon—Nungarin, Trayning and Wyalkatchem. One of those communities is in the member for Moore’s electorate; that happened at the last

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

election. They have worked very closely together on a number of projects. They have been very proactive in trying to work with Western Power and the Minister for Energy to become, as the entity NEWROC, a regional subsidiary that might be able to deliver one of these microgrids or have a disconnection from the grid. They have spoken to me about how they want to do it. They have been working alongside some experts so they are not pie in the sky. They have met with a number of people along the way, including the minister, to express their interest because the communities along the edge of my electorate and also on the edge of the grid suffer from many of the blackouts and brownouts that the Leader of the Liberal Party spoke about. In the summer just gone, there were some extraordinary circumstances.

There are findings about the blackouts and brownouts at the beginning of the report in the executive summary. There is a little list under the heading “Overview of the outages”. It goes through the statistics of how many people were out of power for longer than two hours, how many were without power for at least 12 hours and how many of them experienced two or more outages. The fourth dot point states that 54 per cent of customers who were impacted live in rural areas. The next dot point states that rural customers were more likely to have repeat outages. It is a sad reflection, but none of that is likely to be news to anyone who lives in regional Western Australia because, unfortunately, that is their daily life. It does not take a particularly extraordinary experience like the summer that we have just had, which obviously exacerbated the situation, but certainly for many in regional communities, particularly those on the edge of the grid—the member for Moore will speak about the midwest, which is a particular area of interest—people see this as part of their daily or weekly life. It is very frustrating and costly and it is inhibiting growth in our communities and regions and it puts people at risk from a safety perspective in health and emergency situations. It is no surprise when groups such as NEWROC, an organisation of councils, is looking for alternative solutions. I understand the way that Western Power works and is regulated. Again, I am happy for the minister to correct me. Western Power is a statutory authority and, like the Water Corporation, it works in a regulatory environment that is supposed to protect, or at least prevent, the organisation, which has very limited competition, from gold plating the network and then building in charges that are too high for customers. Is that a summary?

Mr W.J. Johnston: Yes. Can I respond to what you said before?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sure.

Mr W.J. Johnston: NEWROC came to see me. The problem is that the solution that they are talking about won’t work. I tried to explain to them that we’re happy to sit with them and come up with a plan. They’ve had an outside consultant to talk them. That’s not an insult; that’s just a fact. But the solution they’re talking about isn’t the solution; it won’t fix the problem because a battery for their feeder won’t help them. There are other technologies that could help them and we are happy to look at it, but the one that they’re promoting isn’t a solution. It’s not that we do not want to be helpful, but that’s not the solution. What I suggested to them is that they put in a small generator, like an eight-megawatt generator, and that would actually help them. They got confused because they said, “But that generator can’t sell electricity to those customers.” That’s true, but they can sell it to anybody, and when the powerline gets cut for whatever reason, the generator would pick up and support them, and Western Power would be part of that. But the battery is not a solution. There’s another way forward for them and I want to work with them to do it. But not the one they’ve come up with.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am very glad to hear that, and I am glad that that is on the record, because I have to say, minister, NEWROC is frustrated with trying to work with Western Power and with the minister. Western Power documentation that I have seen has identified that Bencubbin is in the top 10 areas of the state that need attention; it is edge of grid. But they are all in a similar situation. I know work has been done on microgrids and how we might embrace that. Certainly, it would be a staged approach. Whatever technology is used, from the conversation I have had with NEWROC, it understands it cannot be done all in one go. Ideally, it would like to see some strengthening and stability in the area that it is dealing with and then the potential for generation, and that might even be renewables. Three of the biggest solar farms in the state are in my electorate. There is certainly one of the biggest windfarms in my electorate. There is no shortage of renewable energy that could be tapped into as part of a generation source or backed up with diesel. The issue is the network and how they go about doing it. If NEWROC could have someone from Western Power sitting alongside it to explain how it can overcome some of the challenges that are being thrown up, it would be most appreciated.

Taking a step back from the North Eastern Wheatbelt Region of Councils and looking at the location of microgrids—again, the minister can correct me either in his contribution or down the track. As I was saying, the regulatory environment for Western Power is such that it cannot gold plate. Essentially, my understanding is that if we are still getting some work out of the network, or the network infrastructure is at a certain level at which it is not failing beyond what it is regulated for, it will prevent any further investment. But it is not ideal because it will fail more often and it essentially will be left to run down and become a system that is almost no longer workable. We are stuck in a catch 22 situation; the system cannot be gold plated and Western Power has to use its own resources unless

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

government provides external funding. That was the same with the Water Corporation. If we wanted to see a project that sat outside what the regulatory environment allowed us to deliver, the government had to make a decision to say, “We think there is a better argument and we will provide external funds to allow this project to proceed.”

In smaller areas where there is a small number of customers—I used to hear this argument all the time internally at the Water Corporation—the impact is not huge in terms of a whole-of-state customer base, but it is huge for those customers who are impacted. It is certainly a challenging policy area, but one that could potentially unlock a whole raft of things for that region. Without a reliable power supply, we will have challenges around not only emergency services, but also the provision of power so that people can go to the general store or use their key card to get out money—it just shuts down everything. I will let the members for Moore and Roe speak on this motion because we all share concerns about the impact of Western Power’s reliability on our telecommunication network. I am not saying that it is only Western Power’s responsibility—for Hansard’s benefit, I am finger-pointing across the chamber—and between government and non-government agencies. It would seem that every other organisation has to strengthen its ability to withstand blackouts and brownouts. Local governments do it. The Department of Health does it. I suggest that there are telcos that do not do it and are having a bit of a Mexican stand-off with both federal and state governments because they think there is funding to be had on this.

From the perspective of my constituents, they just want to see a solution and something put forward that will resolve the fact that when we have these extended blackouts in either an emergency or a situation like the one we saw over summer, they lose power for mobile telecommunications and they are left stranded. Again, I do not think that is acceptable, given our reliance on telecommunications, particularly in emergencies.

Minister, I would very much like to pursue the NEWROC issue. I have a letter drafted. It was literally on Friday that I met with the organisation, and it recently met with the minister. I would like very much to progress —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes. Caroline Robinson is the executive officer. The organisation has a good track record. It is working with the Minister for Local Government to become a regional subsidiary so it can deliver something slightly innovative. I think it is a great opportunity.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That would be wonderful. Thank you. I am sure that that would be most welcome. Thank you, minister. I appreciate that because as of Friday NEWROC felt that it had hit a bit of a roadblock. I want to acknowledge that it is genuinely trying to resolve the problem for Western Power, which internally acknowledges that this needs to be dealt with. If we can cut the cake a different way, I am happy to progress that. Then if we need to find funding for it, I will come back to Parliament and ask for that as well.

The other issue I want to touch on briefly is not directly related to the motion, but it certainly falls within the remit of Western Power—that is, the process of connecting businesses and providing a stable power supply to commercial and residential premises. With commercial power supply, if a business in regional Western Australia wants to expand, the costs are significant compared with a commercial site somewhere in the Perth metropolitan area. Quite often, the amount of power needs to be increased, which is done at cost to the business, and it is wholly reliant on Western Power for the design and delivery of that project.

I have a couple of projects in my electorate that have been through this process recently. They are two really good businesses that have increased jobs and local employment. Bruce Rock Engineering’s trucks and trailers can be seen across the state. It has made a point of expanding the business in Bruce Rock. However, it did not have enough power to manage expanding its workshops. I think that was resolved when the Minister for Regional Development invited the business to apply for a regional economic development scheme grant through the development commission. The business got part of that grant, which allowed it to deal with almost wholly the expansion of the power network or gain increased access to power. Likewise, Bencubbin Trucks N Auto’s applied in the last round of RED grants. It hit a problem when it wanted to expand. In Bencubbin, we do not get a significant number of new businesses wanting to expand their footprint, so we were very keen to give the business an opportunity to do this. Again, it would create new jobs and keep it in the region and provide new opportunities in that part of the shire.

Both are excellent businesses. They were both prepared to deal with Western Power and understood that costs would be associated. Both got RED grants, which I am very supportive of. We said at the last election that we would maintain the grants, if not increase them. I think it is wonderful. The irony that businesses have to apply to one government department to pay another government authority is not lost on anyone in this argument. Nonetheless, as I said, if we can cut the cake differently and get it there, it will get done. The problem with one of those projects was that it took 12 months to go through the process. Some of the charges that were associated with making the application to me seem significantly exorbitant. It took three months to process an initial application, and I think it is around \$500

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

just to make the application. There is a \$3 300 design fee that comes off the final cost, but at that point, people do not know whether they are going to progress or not.

In this case, Bencubbin Trucks N Auto's also needed an electrician to help it fill out the form because it was so technical and it needed to make sure it got it right, so there was that cost as well. If the business got an invoice from Western Power along the way that it did not pay or it was still making a decision on its own time line, it would be another \$500 for Western Power to simply reissue that invoice. Unfortunately, Western Power lost the application. It then declined the application and charged the business for the reissue and management of the application. The business found there was an inability to deal with anyone directly and it was all done online, which was incredibly frustrating. If the business needed clarification, it was simply unable to get it. It was a husband-and-wife team. They got there in the end; the project was done. If someone had described a process like this to me when I was a minister, I would have said, "Oh, that doesn't sound too flash." They are both business owners; they made the application in the husband's name and the wife then wanted to be able to manage the process, so they had to pay about \$800 to have her name added to the application, halfway through the process. I am not quite sure what that covered, but it seems to me slightly ridiculous for the owner of a business not to be recognised as such. That was just to authorise them to actually deal with Western Power.

The business could not bring the shire into the conversation because the pole on its property fed off to both the shire block and its block. It would have made sense if there had been some opportunity to bring the shire in, but that was not accommodated in the process. It simply got "talk to the hand" in that process.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The project has delivered some fantastic outcomes and the business is very grateful that it finally got to the end, but it was ready to go six months ago and it was a 12-month process for it, including having been endorsed by another government department, because it got funding from the Wheatbelt Development Commission through the regional economic development grants process. It just seems to me that that is very hard. We are literally talking about a big shed that allows the business to deal with trucks, auto repairs and fabrication. It was not an entirely complex project, but it seemed to me to take a significant amount of time to deal with.

I deal with Western Power regularly at a local level, and it is very good. I am not criticising the individuals on the ground; to me, this is a systemic issue and we need to try to pull roadblocks out of the way to create opportunities to develop in regional Western Australia. From my perspective, and as is evidenced by both Bruce Rock Engineering and Bencubbin Trucks N Auto's, some work needs to be done on encouraging regional development and pulling those roadblocks out, instead of making it more difficult than it already is.

I thank the minister for offering to follow up with the North Eastern Wheatbelt Region of Councils. It will be most appreciative of that, and hopefully we can get a good outcome. I provided the other issues simply as feedback on some of the challenges we face on a daily basis in terms of pushing regional development and making it easier for people to engage with government departments.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.03 pm]: I had a lovely speech all prepared today, but then the minister released the report so a lot of it had to change. I want to talk about the report and some of the background of it more than going over some of the history, which I already outlined pretty fully in my reply to the Premier's Statement at the start of the parliamentary year.

My electorate takes in much of the midwest, which has been absolutely hammered this year by power outages. The member for Cottesloe outlined some of the circumstances for people in Horrocks, but it also affected people in Lancelin, Perenjori, Mullewa and surrounds, Port Gregory, Northampton, Dongara and Port Denison, to name a few. In fact, many of those communities are notorious for having some of the most unreliable power in the network. There is a history of penalties being incurred by Western Power because of its lack of performance in those areas. The report refers to a \$10 million hit to Western Power for not meeting service standards. I think in one year, \$800 000 of that \$10 million was for Port Denison alone, a community of a couple of thousand people. Members can understand the level of impact that has had on them. Lancelin and Dalwallinu also had high numbers of power outages.

The member for Central Wheatbelt was just talking about NEWROC. Dalwallinu was similarly impacted, and it has a considerable industrial base because it is on the Great Northern Highway and it is the jump-off point to many of the mining areas. There are very considerable businesses there, including the concrete-making business Dallcon; its products can be found on some of the walls on the freeways in Perth, and in picnic areas. I was in Kununurra last year and saw a Dallcon picnic table there, so it is a big supplier of concrete products. There are other businesses that supply such things as plastic tanks, specialist exhaust systems for mining equipment, and all sorts of other things. That area has also been negatively impacted by unreliability of power supply.

The member for Central Wheatbelt also talked about an issue in Dalwallinu around Dallcon's need to expand and the siting of some of Western Power's infrastructure in an area that is basically in the middle of Dallcon's

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

yard. Western Power wants hundreds of thousands of dollars, or millions of dollars, to actually shift the thing. Dallcon builds concrete structures; it is happy to put a concrete fence around it and guarantee access, but nobody is listening. I know letters have been sent to the minister, and I hope the minister has some interest in looking at that, but the latest report I got back was that Dallcon was still running up against a brick wall with Western Power on that issue.

I turn now to the Christmas outage that led to the report. As we know, the power was out for four days. In fact, I think it is in the report that 54 per cent of those affected were in rural and regional areas. It spread right through the midwest as well as Perth, but because it was in the Perth metropolitan area, it got much more attention than what has been repeatedly happening in communities in the midwest for many, many years. In 2020 I brought a grievance to the minister about a subdivision just outside Dongara, and I touched upon the generally sorry state of power supply in Dongara. This subdivision went something like 109 hours in a row without power, which is unacceptable in summertime, as members might imagine—especially in an area where people rely on water being pumped. It is very difficult for those communities.

One issue mentioned in the report by Michelle Shepherd was total fire bans and the ability of Western Power to restore power and to work in certain conditions. I note the response here. I heard the minister talk about that on ABC regional radio this afternoon. He said it was something that could and should be examined. Interestingly, I raised that in a grievance at the time and the minister was not prepared to listen at all. It is not like this issue has not been raised with previous ministers. I am sure I raised it with the former member for Victoria Park, Hon Dr Mike Nahan and also the then emergency services minister Joe Francis at the time. This has been an ongoing issue.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am happy for the minister to do that, but I am not singling this minister out. This has been an ongoing issue since about 2013, when those practices changed. I am well aware of what happened, if the minister wants to inform me. I have been trying to raise the issue with ministers ever since putting in that grievance. The minister's response was that Western Power was not going to start fires. That might be so, but as this report says, there needs to be a balance of community safety here. I am grateful to the author of the report, to Michelle Shepherd. I hope the government takes on board those recommendations. I would dearly love to have someone appointed as an independent expert who is not just a Department of Fire and Emergency Services figure, because then it would be all about fighting and stopping fires and not about the other issues highlighted here, such as the fact that in my communities it might be 45 degrees in the waterbag and there is no air conditioning.

As I said, some areas might be running out of water. The shops have no food and there is a real community safety issue. I think it was said in the other place last week that people should just buy a generator. Many people have, but not everybody is qualified to maintain equipment or to have proper connections. Some people have them wired in their house with it set to start on the main switch or something. That is quite expensive. Other people probably go to Bunnings or somewhere and buy an off-the-shelf generator and then perhaps run lengthy power cords into the house. I used to do that at Badgingarra years ago. I would put a double-ended plug in the wall and turn the power off so that I could run it through the house. It was probably not the smartest thing in the world, and I would not encourage it now. I think it is completely stupid and I hope that people do not do things like that, but we can see that not having reliable power leads to safety outcomes that are less than ideal.

I am very encouraged by the contents of the report. I was critical of the minister when the report was first announced. His press release, and all the information around it, seemed very much concentrated on the response to what had been promoted as a metropolitan problem—the four days of outage. Suddenly we got a review. I have been complaining about this stuff for years and nobody has listened. Understandably, I and my colleague in the other place who looks after the same sort of area that I do in the midwest and wheatbelt got together a petition, which we circulated throughout Western Australia, calling for an independent power review into not just Western Power but Horizon as well. The petition was presented last week.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: No; up at the other place.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister misunderstood and that is fine. There was an e-petition. It was actually the first e-petition ever run by the other house in the Western Australian Parliament. It was couched in the following terms —

To the President and Members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled. We the undersigned ...

express deep concern in relation to the vulnerability of our electricity network in regional WA and the impact that extended power outages has on public health, commerce, education and emergency response.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

We therefore ask the Legislative Council to support a full and independent inquiry into Western Power and Horizon Power to examine the following issues:

1. Preparedness for and response to power outages;
2. The appropriateness of the extended outage payment;
3. Review policies and procedures for mitigating fire risk; and
4. To make recommendations to improve resilience and performance of the network and better serve those who depend on it.

I think it is very similar to what the Shepherd report has come back with. I am happy to say that I am pleased with it. I would like to think that the response from my community and the outpouring of concern by people who signed that petition may have in some way broadened out this issue so there is more of a holistic look. The minister shakes his head, but I think maybe the language from the minister changed over that journey. I know the minister went up to Kalbarri to open the microgrid, which was a welcome piece of infrastructure that came about from a grievance I did with Mike Nahan in 2014. He undertook to look at that issue and then made the announcement following on. There have been some changes that I was a bit disappointed about, but in the end, the money is there and people in Kalbarri seem to tell me that they are happy that happened and have thanked me for my work in getting it going, sitting on the community reference group for years. As members might be aware, there was a boundary change at the last election, and it became the member for North West Central's town. Four weeks later, the town got blown away, almost, by a cyclone. It was almost the opposite of an introduction by fire, I suppose, for the member for North West Central to that community. One positive to come from that area this year was the microgrid.

We have seen other interventions that have helped a bit. In 2018, the township of Mullewa was in a terrible situation, and that has been alleviated by the location of a generator there that kicks in as required. It does not help anyone in the outlying areas so much, so there are people who miss out, but there are people who are well served by it. I have seen other interventions in Perenjori, with the battery energy storage system that was installed. That was opened by Hon Ben Wyatt in the first few weeks of his term as energy minister. It was a project plagued by technical issues. It is located a distance out of town. It does not have any recharge capacity and it has not worked as well as was hoped.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I understand. I had a conversation with the member for Central Wheatbelt about NEWROC, and I said that I did not think that was what that community needed. It probably needs something more direct, especially if we are talking about numerous communities. Once we start trying to make a little network out of a big network, we are going to have the same problems in that area as we had in each of the towns. For some time, I have been calling—I did in the previous government as well—for more local generation as a cure for many of the towns in my electorate. I mean by that the types of responses the minister just spoke about such as the stand-by generator. It does not have to be the world's flashiest thing, but if it comes on for those 20 days of the year when the power is out in Horrocks, then that is a good result. I heard the minister talking about the second line going into Horrocks. That will no doubt help, but the problem is still going to be the accumulation of salt, dust and moisture that comes through at various times, and it will potentially affect both lines. I note that in Binu in February, when I made my speech to the Premier's Statement, there had been two millimetres of rain. I think there were 10 or 15 pole-top fires there. They were poles that had been replaced after cyclone Seroja, so they had not had years to accumulate dust and dirt. It had been one season.

I have concerns. I know it is important to replicate and to have some redundancy, but I am not sure that is always going to be a fix. Interestingly enough, the member for Cottesloe was talking about Horrocks, and some generators were eventually brought there. I was in Horrocks launching a petition when six crews from Western Power were in and around town, washing lines and doing other bits and pieces in the area. They then took the generator from there to Port Gregory, or one of them, at least, and then lo and behold, there was another power outage in Horrocks. It just goes to show that the system up there is very fragile and there are real issues.

I hope that the issues that are examined in the report are taken seriously and that it is not a report that gathers dust. I note that the recommendations oftentimes call for this to be monitored to make sure that issues are dealt with. That is very important.

One area that concerns me a little bit is that in the report there seems to be talk about the trade-off between reliability and cost, and discussion about whether certain regional people might be happy to pay for a more reliable system. I remind people that many of the communities I represent are populated by some of the most economically vulnerable people. They may be retirees on fixed incomes.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: They may be people who are self-funded but do not have a lot of money coming in, so it would be hard on those people to ask them to pay more. The towns of Mullewa and Morawa have very significant Aboriginal populations, and the figures are very understated because oftentimes people are not reported. Houses that are supposed

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

to have three or four people living in them might have 12 people. These numbers are not well understood. There are people who are very stressed economically and cannot go down the path of buying and fuelling a generator. As we know, petrol in Perth is \$2 a litre, and I can tell members that in some regional centres, it is much more. The Honda generators are probably better generators, but the Ozito and other generators are very thirsty beasts; and, if people run them for several days, it will take a number of jerry cans of petrol to keep them going, and that would cost a considerable amount at the moment. It would cost in excess of \$50 in many communities to fill a 20-litre can, and that might keep a generator going for only a day or two. It is a very expensive way to provide power and not a particularly safe one. As I have outlined, community safety is not just about heat stress and the like; it is about refrigeration and the lack of fresh food in some communities. In some communities, the only recreation that people might do if they did not have power in the house would be to go to the local swimming pool, but it would be shut because there would be no filtration. There are many flow-on effects. A lot of issues certainly need to be looked at.

Again, one of the things to come out of the report is the announcement by the minister that the payment given to people who are affected by extended outages will increase to \$120. I am very grateful to the minister that that is happening. I wrote to the minister in 2020 and I received a response on 20 March saying that he would give consideration to increasing the \$80 extended outage payment, so I am glad that that undertaking from the minister has occurred. There will be those who say that \$120 is not enough, and I may be one of them, but at least it is an increase. I think it will go some way towards helping people in the towns who are affected.

I will run through the response to a question on notice I put to the minister in February about some of the power outages and the like. I canvassed the information on power outages fairly well in the contribution I made in February, but I want to look at a good indicator of some of the problems with the extended outage payments that are mentioned in the report. It lists them by incident. An incident occurs and then there is an outage payment. This information is for incidents in the summer period since last November. There was an incident in Port Denison, Dongara and Mullewa—this incident had the greatest number of claims—and 2 741 claims were lodged from towns that have a combined population of about 3 000 people. The next incident was in Northampton, Horrocks, Nabawa, Gregory, Yuna and Dongara, and there were 712 claims. The claims are declining in number. The next incident was in Port Denison, Dongara and Mullewa, and there were 590 claims. After another incident in Northampton, Horrocks, Nabawa, Gregory, Yuna and Dongara, there were 539 claims. After another incident in Northampton, Horrocks, Nabawa, Gregory, Yuna and Dongara, there were 436 claims. These claims have all been lodged since November, so it gives members an idea of the impact in some of these communities. Dongara figured in every one of those lists of outages and I think there were nearly 2 000 claims in Dongara alone. That is an issue.

On the problems that the fire bans cause, I want to talk from the other side. We understand that there are issues in this area. The member for Roe will talk a bit about the impact of a particular power problem that is believed to have led to a fire, but I want to talk about an event that happened in Mogumber in my electorate in 2019. A constituent of mine, Tom Kelly, and his wife, Kaye, had a fire on their property that was believed to have been started by a Western Power fault. Many acres of his farm were destroyed. It had such an impact on his property that some of the country is infertile; it destroyed pretty well everything he had on the property. He has been unable to recover. There are real safety issues, quite obviously. I know that people have lost their lives in incidents, but I am just highlighting that I take the issue of safety seriously. We also need to understand the community safety and other aspects, and that the provision of power is an essential element to the safety of communities. We need to be balanced and not just take an approach that protects Western Power from any potential claim in the future and is completely risk averse, not stupidly risk averse. I need to make that point.

There is one other little matter that I want to briefly touch on. The annual reports for both Western Power and Horizon seem to indicate that quite a considerable amount of money is spent on advertising and marketing. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that they are ostensibly independent entities in a way. I know that they are owned and regulated by government, but they have a board and their own identity as well. According to the annual report, Horizon Power spent \$1.5 million on advertising and marketing.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It has only 47 000 connections, so that is \$33 per connection. The minister does not think that is a lot. He can tell the householders that the first \$33 of their connection cost is going to marketing. I am sure that they would be wonderfully impressed to find that out.

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Western Power spends \$4 million —

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Come on! The member will have her chance very soon; I am about to sit down.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member!

Ms J.J. Shaw interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Member, please! I cannot even hear what the member is saying with her mask on—it is just noise.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Swan Hills!

Mr R.S. LOVE: Western Power spent \$4 million on advertising. It has a substantially larger customer base, so that represents only a couple of dollars per customer. I wonder what it needs to spend this money on. It is not that it is advertising safety messages necessarily; it is advertising and marketing. Who it is marketing itself to is beyond me! Most people do not have much of a choice; if they want power, they have to get it through the Western Power network. Perhaps Synergy has to market itself in some areas where there might be a bit of competition, but for Western Power and Horizon Power it is probably a little bit over the top. It does illustrate that they are their own entities and that the system is complex. That is why I congratulate Ms Shepherd on the report. I thank her for the work that she has done and for the fact that it includes a lot of the issues that I have been speaking about for several years now. I will be keenly following the progress on some of the recommendations and I commend the report to the house.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [5.33 pm]: I certainly rise to support the motion of the Leader of the Liberal Party. It gives me a good opportunity to not only talk about some of the issues in my electorate, but also give a bit of a history lesson to some of our newer members here who may not be familiar with things such as how a pole-top fire starts, for argument's sake. To be honest, I want to give a bit of history about how this is not just a problem for the current government; this has been going on for quite some time. I will lay out some examples that have occurred during governments of both persuasions over the last 20-odd years.

It is quite concerning that we have got to this point. In actual fact, this summer has probably been close to the worst summer that I have experienced not only in my electorate, but also at my farm. We have had pole-top fire after pole-top fire in the locality. I attended another fire the Sunday night before last. Unluckily, that one was caused by lightning, but this summer so many fires have been caused by pole-top fires. Something that came to my attention today in relation to power is that Karratha Senior High School has been closed for most of this week due to power outages. That is concerning as well. Certainly, the Narrogin–Wickepin fire that we experienced this year was really concerning. It started on that terrible day of 6 February and it was reportedly started by a poorly maintained powerline. The wind was so strong that a spark from the clashing powerlines reportedly started the fire. I have to say that the resources that came to that fire were fantastic. Again, I want to thank the crews from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services for the way they handled the situation and worked with the Shires of Wickepin and Narrogin and also the volunteer firefighters who did a fantastic job. The Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party, Hon Martin Aldridge, Hon Steve Martin and I toured the fire's aftermath. At that point, DFES was very worried about the forthcoming Friday when, once again, the same weather conditions were coming through. On that occasion, the thunderstorms bypassed Narrogin and Wickepin and lit up fires in the rest of my electorate in Lake Grace, Hopetoun, Jerramungup, Bremer Bay and Ravensthorpe. We just went from one area to another. We also know of the fires this summer at Denmark, Bridgetown, Corrigin and Bruce Rock. That particular fire in the Shires of Narrogin and Wickepin was really concerning. An article by Cally Dupe in today's *Countryman* reports —

Authorities have confirmed that overhead power lines “coming together” in windy conditions caused a devastating blaze that ripped through 18,000ha and threatened the town of Wickepin ...

She reports that over 10 000 sheep were killed and around 5 000 pigs were either killed or had to be euthanised. She said that several farmers had reported to the *Countryman* that the fire was started by drooping powerlines swinging in the wind and touching, and that a second fire started in the same spot on 11 February, but luckily farmers were close at hand and able to control that one quickly. I know that Western Power put in place a pole to shorten the distance between the lines after the second fire. I am pleased that that happened, but it does create a question mark over the long distances between poles. On my farm there are places where there is a long distance between power poles. In those windy and hot conditions when the wires get up a swing, they can spark and create a fire. It was interesting but concerning that a second fire was created in the same spot later that week.

I want to once again reiterate the toll that this takes on the community. I was at the Dumbleyung tennis tournament on the Sunday after that fire at Narrogin–Wickepin. Some of the people who had been affected by the fires were trying to play tennis and it was quite upsetting to hear how one of them had lost a couple of thousand sheep and another one had lost 600 ewes valued at \$300 a head. It is upsetting in terms of not only the loss in income, but also having to deal with the issue and the toll that that takes. I just wanted to alert members to that.

During the summer, my office had many phone calls about pole-top fires. Second only to the school bus issue, pole-top fires is our main issue, certainly over the summer period. I do not know what is causing them. I know that

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

we have had a hot summer, but we seem to have had a higher incidence of pole-top fires this year. I am not sure whether there has been a decrease in their maintenance or something along those lines.

For newer members, according to the Western Power website —

Pole top fires can happen when there is a run of very hot, dry and windy days followed by a sudden misty, cold front.

Humidity and light rain can combine with dust built up on insulators, resulting in tracks of dirt that can allow electricity to spark, in some cases eventually resulting in metal fixtures heating to a point that causes a fire.

That is actually spot on, minister; that is what happens. We get those drizzly mornings and moisture at the top of the pole. As I said, this issue has been happening since the early 2000s. I know that there have been experiments on the use of a silicone covering on the insulators. I would be curious to know whether the minister can make any comments on where that is at. It is quite ironic how in 2003 the Liberal–National opposition at the time put forward a motion asking for a parliamentary inquiry to investigate the deteriorating infrastructure within Western Power. In March 2004, the Leader of the Opposition tabled a motion condemning the Minister for Energy and the Labor government for the energy crisis in Western Australia. On Wednesday, 18 February 2004, over a million people faced power restrictions. Businesses closed and thousands of people lost a day at work. Surgeries were interrupted, and the list goes on. The minister said that the problems were because of a couple of hot, humid days. On the following day, another motion was tabled about the maintenance and upgrading of Western Power network infrastructure. Again, in April 2004, a question was asked about the recent spate of pole-top fires that had affected more than 10 000 homes in Perth and caused numerous lengthily power outages in the wheatbelt and the midwest. Here we are, 18 years later, revisiting these same things. The then minister, Hon Eric Ripper, acknowledged that there were too many pole-top fires and there needed to be a reduction in pole-top fires. He said —

Western Power is working on this issue ... Western Power has been trialling a new method of silicon coating electrical equipment ...

I am curious to hear whether the minister has some comments on that. The history goes on. In 2010, after years of questions on energy being raised with either government, then Minister for Energy Hon Peter Collier was asked a question about pole-top fires and he provided the chamber with the figures for pole-top fires in January and February of that year as 193. Step ahead a few years, and here we are back on the subject. It concerns me that we cannot seem to find a solution to pole-top fires. Without doubt, they seem to happen every summer, and this year there were many more. Another one I want to point out is the 2012 report from the Standing Committee on Public Administration, which was chaired by Hon Max Trenorden. There are 230-odd pages. I had a look at it today and it was certainly quite scathing that infrastructure had not been dealt with over the years.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As I said, minister, we are talking about both governments here. I will quote the report —

In spite of its repeated assurances over past years that it was “*Managing the Network*”, Western Power announced, on 15 September 2011, that its “*network was reaching the end of its useful and safe life*”, and that ... accelerated investment was necessary ...

A paradigm shift was required in the way that Western Power dealt with things and a number of other recommendations were made. Many of them went to the wooden power pole infrastructure management in Western Australia and how it has been a matter of public interest for many years and will no doubt continue to be of significance in years ahead. It concerns me that it has been happening for such a long time under both governments.

I want to ask the minister about the scenario in South Australia where they use the Stobie pole, which was invented by James Stobie in the 1920s. It overcame two South Australian problems; one was scarce timber, of course, and the other was termites. There are now 725 000 Stobie poles in South Australia. They are basically made from two steel joists, which are held apart by a slab of concrete. They vary from nine metres to 26 metres in length and they have the ability to carry between 240 volts and 275 000 volts. Their expected life span is more than 80 years. Apart from insulators, I am curious to hear the minister’s comments on that scenario. In Western Power’s *State of the infrastructure report 2019/20*, 192 074 of the 621 191 wooden poles were identified as either needing replacement or some sort of work done on them. It is concerning that that number of poles need treatment or even replacement. In that same report from 2019–20, it states that in 2015–16, there were 128 pole-top fires and that number had risen in 2019–20 to 498 fires. I am sure that we have had more than 498 pole-top fires this year—well and truly.

I want to quickly run across issues in my electorate. As the minister knows, the feeder lengths coming from the Katanning substation are incredibly long. We had an incident back in 2019 when there were problems feeding out through to Lake King. That feeder line contains over 2 000 kilometres of overhead high-voltage lines, so it really creates headaches and it is very hard to isolate where the problems occur. In August 2020, there were problems in

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

Mindarabin, which feeds 27 customers. In 2021, weather was blamed for a number of outages in Boscabel and Newdegate. On 9 February 2021, in Bremer Bay, which is at the end of a very long feeder from the Albany substation, there were serious issues with the pub and other businesses. With the high visitor numbers during summer, when Bremer Bay goes from 5 000 people up to anywhere around about 10 000 people, it can create real headaches for those businesses. This year, Dumbleyung and Dongolocking had many hours of outages, similar to what the member for Moore also pointed out. Ravensthorpe, as well, is very much at the end of the line. Many constituents there have commented to me how they just cannot take it much longer because of the unreliability of the Ravensthorpe powerline. I know the minister is fully aware of that.

I assume he might also mention how he and I attended the east of Esperance outfit the other week. It is portable solar with a diesel backup, which also provides backup for the telecommunications network. That may be a potential solution for some of those outlying areas.

Finally, I want to agree with the member for Moore's comments about fire bans. I do not think it is tenable for Western Power to say, "Sorry, there's a fire ban or a harvest ban so we can't go out into the paddock and fix it up." We have seen the issues this year. Arrangements can be made with local fire brigades and the like. I do not think it is acceptable. People can go out there but under stringent guidelines. Some of these communities are really suffering. I understand that it is hot and all the rest of it, but there are ways to deal with these things. If we look at how that happened with the Narrogin–Wickepin fire, threatening town sites and the like was not good for the community. In conclusion, I am curious about the minister's comments on poles and insulators as well as fire bans. As I said, there has been a long history under both governments. We can see it in all these reports. I look forward to the minister's response.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [5.50 pm]: I am really pleased to participate in this debate. In addressing the question about the *Unassisted failure* report, I note that that report was published in 2012. It was a moment in time, and Western Power changed. Quite frankly, it changed under a Liberal–National government. I was the shadow minister just after *Unassisted failure* was published. There was also an EnergySafety report about the same time that condemned the management of Western Power. It showed that Western Power did not even know where its power poles were. It had no database of anything. It could not tell anyone how old its poles were. The poles were literally collapsing. What Western Power did, and it did the right thing—this was under your government—was, firstly, it created a database so that it would know everything about its assets. It now knows the age, GPS location and everything else about its assets. I make it clear: it was done while you were in government. But it was the right response to the *Unassisted failure* report. The issues raised by *Unassisted failure* no longer exist because Western Power changed its practices.

I spoke to the EnergySafety people because in responding to the EnergySafety report and *Unassisted failure*, Western Power did not actually follow their recommendations. I raised that with the director of EnergySafety at the time. Western Power had something like two years to get itself in order, and it was about 18 months into that process that I spoke to the director. The director said to me, "Look, actually we think Western Power's response is better than what we had directed it to do." In the end, EnergySafety adopted the practices of Western Power. All that stuff in *Unassisted failure* is in the past. The number of poles that actually break and collapse is very, very small; of the 600 000 poles, there is a small number each year. The whole point is that the *Unassisted failure* report, which as the member said was chaired by a National Party member and responded to by a Liberal–National government, is in the past, so those things are no longer relevant.

The number of pole-top fires goes up and down depending on the environment. It is not maintenance that changes whether there are pole-top fires, it is the environment. If there is a large storm in January, there are no pole-top fires in February and March, but if there is no large storm in January, we end up having more pole-top fires in February and March. That is the way it works. It is true that while members opposite were in government, Western Power did silicone all these insulators, but, unfortunately, the silicone did not perform in the manner that was expected so we have run into the same challenges faster than we expected. The challenge is that Western Power went back to continue the siliconing of the insulators, but that is live work. Western Power found that it does not have a safe system of work, so it cannot do live siliconing. The only way a line can be siliconed is if it is switched off. As the member for Moore pointed out, if the line is switched off, it means that people are without power. Residents are impacted in the same way by a planned outage and an unplanned outage, but of course we need planned outages to do the maintenance on the network. It is actually very difficult to do long lines. The people of Horrocks and Port Gregory suffer more than people in another location, such as the electorate of the member for Vasse, because the environmental performance is different. It is not that the approach to the problem is different, it is that the environment in which the approach is applied is different.

The other thing the member talked about was the people on the edge of the Western Power network. They are genuinely at the edge of the grid. The further someone is down a rural feeder, the more problems they have. It is called physics. Electrons travel through a wire. That is what happens. Therefore, there are more opportunities for

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

failure with longer lines. The further the electron travels, the more likely there is to be a failure. This is in the report. Unlike any other infrastructure, if the infrastructure instantaneously does not cope with the circumstances, whether it has been damaged by an external force or for some other reason, it ceases to function 100 per cent. There is no 95 per cent. If a road suddenly has too many cars on it, the cars all go slow, but if there are more electrons than the equipment can cope with, the equipment stops functioning and nobody gets the electrons. It is much more difficult to manage electrical infrastructure than any other type of infrastructure. The other thing that is different is that it can kill you. Any contact with electrical infrastructure will kill the person who has that contact. Members have to understand how hard this is. I am happy to talk to the member offline about specific problems.

I went up and saw the people at Northampton and Chapman Valley, and my staff and Western Power will go up and talk to them again on 4 April, I think, about some of the management issues for that community. We are putting in extra infrastructure to try to help the people in Horrocks and Port Gregory, and there is more work to be done for the people in Irwin. Some people ask me whether I can guarantee 100 per cent reliability, but I cannot. This is one of the challenges for people who choose to live in these wonderful locations. They get all these benefits, but one of the risks is that they are in a more difficult position for the electrical infrastructure. It does not matter who the minister or the government is; that is just the reality.

We are looking to new technologies like the Perenjori battery. The Perenjori battery is not currently functioning because the manufacturer did not meet the standards it said it would meet. I understand we are waiting for parts to arrive from the manufacturer in Europe, but they have been delayed because of COVID. As the member said, it was installed by the former government. I never criticised the former government in the media for doing that because it was trying. It is interesting. I never once did that in my five years as shadow Minister for Energy. I make clear that I complained about the outcomes of *Unassisted failure* because that was a complete and utter failure of leadership by the senior management at Western Power. They were deliberately trying to save money at that time. But since Western Power changed its management and addressed the *Unassisted failure* and EnergySafety report recommendations, I have never criticised Western Power for individual line outages, because there is no joy in that. It does not matter who the minister is, there will always be outages on individual lines because of contact with external matters, such as a car taking down a pole. Remember, a number of the outages at Christmas were because of cars versus poles. It also happens with storms. We had two storms run through Perth in 2020 within four weeks of each other and they took out infrastructure. There is nothing we can do about that. If a big storm comes through and picks up somebody's garden shed and throws it into a Western Power substation, 10 000 people will be without power. It is no good saying that the minister did not do a good job, because it was the wind that took the garden shed into the infrastructure. We will continue to do better over time as we apply technology to improve these problems.

Remember, we do not make any money out of it. There is always confusion about this. A map in the report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee shows the cost of supply for people in the Western Power footprint. It is a heat map in which dark green is the lowest cost and dark red is the highest cost. It is 24 times more expensive to provide electricity for people in the dark red areas than those in the dark green areas. We do that willingly. It is not about making money. Western Power and Synergy lose money in the electorates of the two members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition. It is not done for financial reasons. We do it because we understand that it is a necessary service that everybody should expect. We are constantly trying to invest to improve the infrastructure to provide a better service. We understand that it is not perfect and we apologise again. I know how frustrating it is, but we are genuinely interested in trying to get a good outcome here.

I will make this point about telecommunications. I have written to the federal government on a number of occasions to point out that it expects the Leader of the Opposition's constituents to have a lower level of service than the constituents in New South Wales because the constituents in New South Wales live closer together and therefore have better telecommunications outcomes. The commonwealth government is responsible for telecommunications. It could make it a requirement that telecommunications providers have to have more reliable telecommunications and that would fix the problem, particularly now when everybody relies on mobile phones for emergencies. There was nothing we could do during cyclone Seroja, noting that people with standalone power systems kept their power on, but, generally, standalone power systems are not the solution for towns and larger communities. Even the microgrid in Kalbarri would not have stopped the power being lost because of cyclone Seroja. The commonwealth government knows that, yet it still allows people in the member for Central Wheatbelt's communities to have unreliable telecommunications. The commonwealth government could fix that now. The member for Roe talked about—I cannot remember the name—the community in which we put in a standalone power system for Telstra, but Horizon Power gave that SPS to Telstra for that community. The federal government could put them in right across the wheatbelt today. In fact, Boundary Power in its joint venture—I cannot remember whether it is Hybrid Systems—with Horizon could sell those to the federal government today to solve the problem now.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

I turn to bushfire management. Let me make it clear that the report does not say that Western Power should change its practices to manage bushfire risks. I appreciate that this is very sensitive. In fact, this is what the Shires of Chapman Valley and Northampton talked about when I was up there. The report says that an independent person should work with Western Power, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the local government authorities to see what can be done. As I said to the member in response to the grievance, we cannot have Western Power burning things down; that is unacceptable. It is not about the hot work; rather, it is about the reclosers because automatic equipment will restart a line, but the risk is that if the line is broken physically rather than a transient, when it is restarted, it starts a fire.

Western Power inspects the line to make sure there is no physical outage before it restarts the line. It is the challenge of the inspection; it is not the challenge of the hot work. Obviously, Western Power cannot do any hot work until afterwards. I do not think the member is asking us to change that; it is the line inspections. Western Power is now using drones and other technology, but sometimes, for example, during the Roleystone outage, drones simply cannot be used for the line inspection. Once Western Power inspects the long line and knows that it can be restarted, it cannot restart all the subsystems on that line because there may have been damage to the subpart and, therefore, it has to restart each part separately, which is why outages on rural feeders take longer for the power to restart than they do on metropolitan feeders. Every state in Australia recognises this. For example, in Queensland it is 18 hours for the standard, not 12 hours, and for rural long, it is 24 hours. In New South Wales, the urban is 12 hours, the same as it is in Western Australia, but the rural long is 18 hours. All states of Australia recognise the challenge of providing electricity on long lines. Again, I am not saying that that is an excuse and I am not saying that that is the end of my work. What I am saying is that that is the reality of long lines for communities.

One of the first things I did when I became the Minister for Energy at the end of 2018 was to hold a forum in Geraldton. As many people who wanted to came from the community to talk to me. I have been to Morawa and met with people there. As I said, I had a conversation with the Northampton and Chapman Valley people. I have met with the representatives of the North Eastern Wheatbelt Region of Councils. I am happy to engage with people to try to work out what the solutions will look like. I am very happy to do that. I have read the petition tabled by the member for Moore and I am looking at things there. Members in the other chamber have raised issues with me. The member for Geraldton has had a number of conversations with me. One of the important points made in the report is that whilst Western Power meets all but its CBD benchmarks—it is ironic that it is the CBD benchmark that it does not meet, not the rural ones, but, of course, the CBD one is much stricter—because it is averages, we miss the nuance. Even though all those nuances are available from Western Power—we gave the opposition all the information in an answer the other day—one of the recommendations is that more fine granular detail be put into clearer and more transparent reporting on Western Power, which is a great recommendation, and I look forward to that occurring.

We understand the challenges, but we have to understand what the challenges actually are, which is why I was so disappointed in the member for Cottesloe. His speech was just bizarre. He criticised Western Power for an outage in his electorate that affected 24 people when it was a private pole, not a Western Power asset. Western Power had no legal authority to work on that pole; indeed, the problem was that the contractor who was engaged to fix the pole did not turn up. It is a bit rich to blame the government of Western Australia or Western Power for a pole that did not belong to Western Power and for a contractor who did not turn up to fix it, but that is typical of the stuff he goes on about. He alleged that I ignored questions from the opposition about Roleystone power security in the lead-up to the 2021 election. I looked at *Hansard*, but no member of the opposition asked me any questions about Roleystone power reliability at any time during 2020—none—yet the member for Cottesloe stood up and said that it had happened. The member for Moore raised issues about power reliability and the former member for Geraldton, Ian Blayney, raised some issues. It is just—I will look for parliamentary terminology here—that he should have known what the truth was and I am surprised that he said something that was not the truth. He will have to explain why he did that. I asked him at the time, “When did I say the things you claim I said?”, but he moved on to another topic. He fabricated that. It is just wrong what he did there. He should not do that, but he does it all the time. It is very disappointing.

The member for Cottesloe talked about the difference between the categories—CBD, suburbs, rural short and rural long. That is transparent; it is what we report. We report all those issues. That is not new. The reason we do so is that the CBD is a tight grid. When there is a failure of one item, another piece of infrastructure can take the electricity. But a rural long setup has a single wire for greater than 60 kilometres, so any break in the wire means that there is an outage, and that is why there are different standards.

The member for Cottesloe talked about the age profile without understanding what it actually means. He talked about the Australian Energy Market Operator approving spending by Western Power. Member for Swan Hills, who approves spending by Western Power?

Ms J.J. Shaw: The Economic Regulation Authority.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Thank you. The AEMO has nothing to do with expenditure.

He was trying to talk about what I said on radio. On radio I said that there were two issues about electricity supply: do we have enough electricity to go to people's houses, and can we get to it their houses? I explained on radio that the Australian Energy Market Operator makes sure that we have enough electricity, and then Western Power takes it to people's houses. The point I made on radio is that we never ran out of electricity. The problem was that we could not get it to people's houses.

I know other members want to talk, so I will not go on much longer, but I just want to point out another thing. There was the comment, "It was hot; why does that matter?" It is because the equipment that we use in the electricity system is air cooled. If we have a series of hot days, it means that the equipment does not cool. We can then have outages caused by high temperatures in the equipment. If someone is not deeply embedded in the electricity system, they probably do not understand this other thing, but if we had four hot days on a workday, the electricity would have been flowing in a different manner. It would have been flowing into industrial sites, with, generally speaking, the power coming in on the transmission level—that is, the high-voltage level, not the low-voltage level—but because everybody was at home, the total amount of electricity used on those four days was not a record for Western Australia. Had it been a weekday, there would never have been a blackout and there would never have been any outages in the suburbs. The problem was that it was four hot days on a weekend. What does that mean? That is in the report. Western Power has a planning process to make sure that it builds infrastructure in advance of it being needed. That is its planning criteria. Over 120 years, there have only ever been three times with four hot days like that. It is unprecedented temperature. If the same thing happened in the 1950s, with no air conditioners, it would not have mattered, but because it was unprecedented, it breached the planning criteria that Western Power uses for investing the infrastructure. Remember, we invest in infrastructure years in advance of when we use it. The report recommends that Western Power changes its planning processes so that it is more granular and has more detail in it so that we do not have the same situation coming up.

I will just finish up on these two points. The first is that the member for Cottesloe said that Western Power spent 12 per cent less on its distribution network asset investments. But he did not read the next part of the sentence in the report, that states, "and overall, three per cent less across the whole network". What happened was Western Power invested \$368 million less in the distribution system because it spent that money on other parts of the network. This claim that Western Power reduced its expenditure is not true. That is what Michelle Shepherd said on page 10 of the report. She also said that at no time had the government not approved expenditure. The report states —

Over the past five years, Western Power, through funding approval processes with the independent regulator and the State Government, appears to have been approved to make all distribution capital investments it identified for the network. There was no evidence that investments were delayed or did not occur due to regulatory or governmental decisions.

The member did not read that piece. He does not want to present the truth because he does not like the facts.

I will finish on the second point, which is the issue raised by the member for Moore about the outages not meeting the so-called service standard adjustment mechanisms, or SSAMs. There are service standard benchmarks, which are the regulatory requirements, then there are these other additional benchmarks that are more granular. There was a financial penalty of \$10.7 million for the SSAMs, not the service standard benchmarks. As it says in the report —

Western Power is incentivised (through the SSAM) to meet more stringent Service Standard Targets (SSTs), which require better performance than that required to meet the SSBs. These are also agreed between Western Power and the ERA.

Historically, Western Power has performed well against SSTs. However, for 2020–21, the SSAM financial penalty was \$10.7 million which was mainly due to underperformance of SAIDI in Urban and Rural areas against the targets.

That is exactly what I said on the radio at the time. I was asked, "Have they been meeting their targets?" I said, "No, they haven't been." That was not driven by underinvestment. This is a very complicated system. It is instantaneous and it is deadly, but it actually performs at very high levels of performance. It is not like we are in Texas, where the whole electricity system shut down for a month. It is not like we are in Europe, where millions of people have been thrown off the electricity system. It is not like the east coast, where they are challenged about whether they have enough power stations to provide electricity for the system. This is a well-managed system. It can be done better, and this report gives us a clear pathway to get even better performance, because I know everybody who was affected by the outages wants to see better performance.

MR S.N. AUBREY (Scarborough) [6.15 pm]: I rise in response to this motion brought forward by the opposition. In fact, I take pride in responding to this motion, as I am likely one of the only people in this house who has the

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

knowledge, qualifications, and hands-on experience to work on high-voltage distribution systems. I know the shadow Minister for Energy thinks that energy policy is quite simple—simple enough that it can be written by two politicians and a staffer over a couple of weeks in the backroom of the Liberal Party office. The reality on the ground is that energy policy and the electricity network in Western Australia is far more complicated than the opposition alludes to. The opposition purported in its contributions that Western Power has failed to manage the network effectively and this resulted in the outages experienced over the Christmas period. This is absolutely false. I will quote directly from the report. It says —

In regards to Western Power’s asset management and maintenance approach, the Review found Western Power meets good industry practice. In particular the Review found that:

- Western Power has developed a sound asset management system and related policies to ensure network infrastructure is maintained and performing as expected.

In relation to the causes of the outages, the report had this to say —

The Review was advised by the Bureau of Meteorology ... that the Christmas 2021 heatwave was exceptional for its timing, intensity and duration. The Perth metropolitan region experienced four days with maximum temperatures above 40 degrees, which has occurred only 3 times in 123 years, as well as very high overnight minimum temperatures.

As the minister just explained, this has an extreme effect on the electricity network in the metropolitan and rural areas. The report also states —

The outages were largely caused by overloads on the distribution network. The combination of weather conditions and high levels of customer demand resulted in electricity demand exceeding the capacity of some network assets.

The report also notes Western Power’s response and preparation for the outages, which the opposition should have read. It said —

In the lead up to the 2021–22 summer, Western Power identified and implemented a number of actions to manage and correct forecast network capacity risks. These included switching to shift load away from heavily loaded areas of the network and some capacity expansion projects, all of which were completed prior to December 2021.

In addition, just prior to and during the heatwave, further actions were taken to help minimise and reduce the impact on customers of the outages. This included load switching to shift customer load away from heavily loaded areas of the network, and some use of back-up generators.

- The Review found the strategies employed by Western Power reduced the number of outages and outage lengths, and could be expanded and employed more in the future.

As probably the only member of Parliament in this house with hands-on experience in maintaining HV electricity networks, I would like to emphasise that it is simply not possible for electricity networks to be 100 per cent reliable, as the minister explained before. I have seen and restored many after-fluke incidents such as lightning strikes, and swaying lines during extreme weather events such as storms and dust storms. Birds, funnily enough, can also be responsible for outages in some circumstances. I am sure that many members look at birds on powerlines and wonder how they can just sit up there unharmed. On the mine site I worked on, pink and grey galahs were notorious for shorting lines and blowing pole-top fuses. If they spread their wings across the span of the powerlines, they can short the phases and, in some cases, if they do not incinerate immediately, they can cause significant power outages. I am sorry if this makes members avoid the chicken in the dining room tonight!

Working on high-voltage and low-voltage electricity networks is not only a highly specialised skill and a highly regulated industry, but also a highly dangerous occupation. Safety standards and practices must be stringently followed to protect workers from significant harm or death from not only the electricity, but also the heat and weather conditions these workers face. The conditions during outages are generally some of the most extreme: storm events, heat waves, bushfires, floods and more. Add to these hazardous conditions the public pressure on workers to reinstate power as soon as possible.

Our state’s energy network workforce has performed admirably in increasingly frequent extreme climate events. Western Power has had to contend with extreme climate events in recent times that have each had a significant impact on its network. These include severe storms stretching from Quinns Rocks to Albany in 2020; the Wooroloo, Wundowie and Red Gully bushfires in January, February and March 2021; storm-related flooding in Northam and surrounding areas in March 2021; and, of course, tropical cyclone Seroja in April 2021.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

The impacts of and the increase in the number of severe weather events in Western Australia is undoubtedly linked to climate change, as the report states —

While the weather conditions during the Christmas holiday period were unusual, such extreme events are expected to occur more frequently in the future as a result of climate change.

The McGowan Labor government is taking direct action on climate change. Unlike the federal Liberal–National government, the McGowan Labor government is not placing hope in technologies that have not been invented yet; it is investing in technologies and initiatives that will help Western Australia tackle the challenges of climate change. We have the first-ever Ministers for Climate Action and Hydrogen Industry. The 2020–21 state budget funds a suite of measures to shape climate resilient communities and help Western Australia forge ahead towards a prosperous low-carbon future. That investment includes, but is not limited to, a \$750 million climate action fund to deliver initiatives designed to address the threat of climate change and help industry flourish to create sustainable jobs; a \$61.5 million boost for WA’s renewable hydrogen initiatives; \$100 million for an investment attraction and new industries fund; \$30.9 million towards the Plan for Our Parks, in addition to the existing \$54.9 million investment; and \$18.5 million over five years to fight erosion and protect WA’s coastline, which is extremely important to my electorate. These projects will not only make our energy network more resilient to the increasing challenges associated with climate change, but also our communities as a whole more resilient to the effects of climate change.

The Liberal and National Parties might lack leadership on climate change and energy policy, but the McGowan Labor government does not. The McGowan government and the Minister for Energy have acted and planned for Western Australia’s energy future. In May 2019, Minister Johnston announced an energy transformation strategy and established the Energy Transformation Taskforce. The task force produced and released in December 2019 the distributed energy resources road map to ensure our energy network caters for and optimises the rapid uptake of renewable energy products such as rooftop solar. In August 2020, the Energy Transformation Taskforce also delivered the comprehensive *Whole of system plan* on Western Australia’s energy network. Ensuring we manage and guide Western Australia’s energy network is underpinned by highly collaborative modelling by market agencies, industry participants, technology businesses, future investors and financial institutions. Having had over 120 meetings with stakeholders, two industry forums and relying on high-quality data, the *Whole of system plan* and distributed energy resources road map join a host of related plans and strategies that have been delivered by the McGowan Labor government. That includes the state electric vehicle strategy, *Collie’s just transition plan*, the Western Australian renewable hydrogen strategy, the future battery industry strategy, the WA recovery plan, and the Western Australian climate policy. These plans and strategies are all aimed at delivering a stronger economy and energy future, whilst creating and protecting jobs and transitioning to lower-emission electricity generation and decarbonising across the Western Australian economy. The McGowan Labor government has industry evidence and stakeholder-backed plans and strategies. The opposition’s only strategy is to undermine and then privatise Western Power.

I would like finish by commending the Minister for Energy for his leadership on energy policy. I commend Western Power and Horizon Power and their workforces for their efforts during what has been a challenging time and going forward.

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [6.23 pm]: I, too, stand in opposition to this motion. I want to address how the McGowan Labor government has ensured the accessibility of energy for all Western Australians but, more particularly, has addressed the needs of some of our most vulnerable community members.

As a social worker, I note some of the innovations that have recognised and responded to the challenges experienced by those experiencing financial disadvantage and people, particularly women, leaving situations of domestic violence. These innovations have reduced people’s experience of hardship. But I want to start with the fundamental importance of Western Power and Horizon Power being 100 per cent owned by the people of Western Australia. They are significant community assets, owned by Western Australians for Western Australians. Public ownership allows us to maintain the best interests of the community of Western Australia in all decision-making, policies and programs. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, has a long history of privatising government and community assets and of returning to its ideas of privatising Western Power itself. This kind of practice would privatise the profits but socialise the losses. It would see profitability for any shareholders put above the needs of the community, and particularly for those in our community who are vulnerable, including those to whom delivering power, such as those in the regions, is going to be, at best, less profitable and, at worst, run at a loss. In the metropolitan area, the average connection costs \$10 000 to \$20 000 to service over a 50-year period. In the outer metropolitan and regional areas of the SWIS, this cost is more than \$240 000 per customer. Our government’s uniform tariff policy ensures that all households and small businesses, no matter where they are located in the state, pay the same electricity tariffs. This annual subsidy is a more than \$160 million commitment to residents all over Western Australia.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

The Liberal Party's stance on privatisation is a risk to all consumers, but particularly to regional consumers. The Liberal Party would instead want prices to be cheaper in the metropolitan area than in country areas. It is important to note, as has previously been stated, that Western Power's income and expenditure as well as service benchmarks and targets are all determined independently from government by the Economic Regulation Authority through the access arrangement process, which is open to public community consultation. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission found that WA has the lowest retail margin of any retail jurisdiction and that we pay the lowest amount for power with the exception of Tasmania, with all its hydropower, and that most customers still purchase power from the government. Similarly, the Northern Territory has large government subsidies.

If members believe that privatisation would somehow deliver prices that are the same or better, they are wrong. If they believe privatisation would somehow improve regional reliability without unaffordable price hikes, they are likewise wrong, and if they believe privatisation would somehow benefit customers who are vulnerable such as those fleeing domestic violence and that their interests would be put above shareholders, they are simply deluded. Privatisation would also be unlikely to result in improvements to our extended outage payment scheme. It is also hard to imagine the full cooperation of private owners in a rapidly stood-up independent review into the Christmas outages.

Public ownership means that Western Power is for all Western Australians. It means, for example, that when cyclone Seroja hit, requiring the replacement of more than 3 500 poles, Western Power performed 30 per cent of its annual regular maintenance in just six weeks. With around 170 transmission or high-voltage poles and 150 transmission insulators needing replacement, Western Power also did the equivalent of six months of scheduled transmission line work, or 50 per cent of its annual transmission program, in just six weeks. Let us remind ourselves that that was over a geographic area larger than Tasmania, with distances spanning 700 kilometres north to south and 150 kilometres east to west. Some workers from our government-owned electricity companies even camped out at the Mungarra power station in order to get Geraldton back online. In Victoria, by contrast, after the June floods and October storms, thousands of residents were left without power for weeks over areas far smaller than those impacted by Seroja. Western Power, owned by the community of WA, is for everyone in WA, day to day and in times of crisis.

The McGowan Labor government is absolutely committed to everybody in Western Australia paying the same price for electricity. The uniform tariff policy means that small-use Synergy and Horizon Power customers are all charged the same rate. This includes customers in remote regions where the cost to supply electricity is considerably higher. For example, the cost to supply electricity in Nullagine in the Pilbara is \$2.32 per kilowatt hour, \$1.42 in Marble Bar, \$1.48 in Sandstone and \$1.60 in Menzies. There are no circumstances in which those residents would be able to get cheaper electricity under the Liberal Party's policy of privatisation. Abandoning the uniform tariff policy would mean that people in country WA would pay far more than people in Perth.

In addition to this policy, there are many other specific ways that Western Power supports customers. I refer to the extended outage payment. The McGowan government is increasing this payment from \$80 to \$120—the first increase since the scheme was introduced, by a Labor government, in 2005. This payment is an inconvenience payment made by Western Power rather than compensation as such. It is a payment made by other users of the electricity system to those who have had interruptions. It is one of the most generous and accessible arrangements in Australia. There are minimal exclusions and a clear process, making it easier to get. The former government did not increase the \$80 payment over the eight and a half years it was in power, except once in response to a major storm event. This payment is made out of the income of Western Power. Western Power's only income is from the users of the electricity system; it is paid by the energy consumers of WA. Any increase in that compensation—the inconvenience payment—comes from users of the energy system. Again, that is Western Australians looking after Western Australians.

Beyond those who experience outages, Western Power does much to support customers experiencing hardship. I note that between 2011–12 and 2017–18, the number of Synergy's residential customers who had had their power disconnected increased by 82.6 per cent. At the same time, power prices increased. The previous government's approach was to limit actual engagement with and support for Western Australians; instead, it brought in the debt collectors. Rather than simply writing off debt and sending debt collectors after people, we are working directly and actively with people to provide support.

The McGowan Labor government has introduced and delivered a number of strategies to support customers experiencing hardship. This includes a case management program providing one-on-one support. For those experiencing chronic hardship, the case management program provides the support of a dedicated Synergy case manager and flexible payment terms, and may offer incentives if customers meet their payment goals. Since it was launched as a pilot program with government support in July 2020, hundreds of customers have graduated, clearing millions of dollars in debt, and they are now better placed to manage their energy bills going forward. It is a great program. I know, from many of my colleagues in the social services sector, that that case management program has had a real impact on people's day-to-day lives by reducing hardship and stress.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

We reintroduced the household energy efficiency scheme that had been cut by the Barnett government. We have also introduced the domestic violence Fresh Start policy. People who are experiencing family and domestic violence can access customer support representatives through a dedicated call line. Those representatives have received specialised training to help and support customers who are experiencing family and domestic violence, or who are in other vulnerable and unsafe situations. Customers experiencing family and domestic violence can be supported with options relating to moving house; changing their account; increasing security on their energy accounts; managing their electricity bills and accessing payment support; creating a new contract that has no connection to the person's previous address or account, making sure no more bills or reminders are sent relating to an old account; and determining options relating to any existing debt. They are also provided with access to a dedicated team for ongoing support with their energy account. Again, I know from my community service colleagues about the very real impact this program has had on people who are fleeing family and domestic violence—not just in the time of crisis when they are fleeing, but also in managing their ongoing electricity needs and liabilities, enabling them to make a fresh start.

We have provided a bespoke portal for financial counsellors. Indeed, it was the advocacy of financial counsellors that resulted in things like the case management program and the Fresh Start program. Again, we have had feedback in writing from financial counsellors about how much they appreciate these schemes and how their clients benefit from them. We introduced the smart energy for social housing pilot and increased funding for the hardship utility grant scheme, making improvements to HUGS to make it even easier to access. Further, this state government is committed to delivering an energy sector that upholds the long-term interests of consumers. We have created a consumer advocate position at Energy Policy WA that has resulted in the formation of a working group with community support organisations, many of my previous colleagues, and energy retailer and policy representatives. The 2019–20 state budget included an allocation of \$954 000 for the Western Australian advocacy for consumers of energy program. This program coordinates consumer advocacy efforts and streamlines consultation processes, making it much easier for people to have their say.

In response to COVID, we have provided COVID relief measures through electricity bill offsets of up to \$3 000 for eligible small businesses and charities and up to \$1 210 for households. We have provided a disconnection moratorium for those experiencing hardship due to COVID. Again, I was working at Wanslea when COVID first hit. We were one of the charities that benefited from that scheme. It certainly made a difference to our ongoing operations; of course, many of the people whom we served in the community benefited from the household offset as well as the disconnection moratorium, as we were working with some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

It is impossible to support any motion that suggests that the McGowan Labor government has inflicted hardship and loss on Western Australians when we have a clear and broad strategy and a suite of really innovative, specific and targeted programs to address hardship and to actually empower people to manage their energy use and energy bills and support those most vulnerable in our community to access this vital, publicly owned resource.

MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston) [6.36 pm]: I follow the Minister for Energy and the members for Scarborough and Nedlands in rising to speak against the motion that has been moved by the opposition today. The member for Nedlands put so eloquently that the suggestion that hardship and financial loss for thousands of Western Australians should be firmly sat at the feet of the McGowan Labor government is a total and utter furphy. I want to point out that I obviously wholeheartedly disagree with the premise of this motion and say that the argument that the opposition has put today is not factual whatsoever.

I also want to put to rest the opposition's claim that the failure to properly maintain state-owned electricity networks lead to blackouts. This is also not factual. In fact, in relation to the Christmas power outages, in the report that was released today and the information that I have and am certainly going to quote for the purpose of *Hansard*, according to the independent review conducted by Australian Energy Market Commissioner Michelle Shepherd, the cause was record-breaking high temperatures over four days, as outlined by the member for Scarborough, resulting in the abnormally high use of air conditioners and fans putting pressure on the network. The report noted that these types of events, while historically rare, may occur more frequently due to the impacts of climate change. The information I have states —

The review found that the State Government approved all funding requests made by Western Power towards capital improvements to the distribution network over the past five years.

That is the five years that the McGowan Labor government has been in office —

It states there was 'no evidence that investments were delayed or did not occur due to regulatory or governmental decisions'.

In other words, this government supports the work of the electricity sector, the energy sector and Western Power in doing what is probably one of the most challenging jobs—that is, supplying the whole of Western Australia with a reliable energy source and energy sector.

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

The premise of the opposition's argument today is categorically incorrect. At this point, I could sit down, but it would be remiss of me not to cover off and remind this chamber about the opposition's systemic failure to plan for WA's energy future. It puts the opposition in clear contrast with our government's plans for the energy sector and our plans to futureproof the energy sector. Looking well beyond the election in 2025, we are actually working towards a much longer term plan that will mean that any subsequent governments will benefit from the decisions being made by this government, ably led by the Minister for Energy and supported by his staff, Western Power and its workers.

I want to reiterate for the purpose of the chamber and Hansard that I understand that the member for Cottesloe—I am trying to find a parliamentary term for this—highlighted the fact that people were not particularly happy about receiving an energy rebate. I have to say that that is totally contrary to anything that anybody told me in the lead-up to the election. They could not believe the support that this government gave them through the \$600 energy rebate. It certainly came at a time when the impacts of COVID were worse than we had forecast. Thankfully, as members can see today, two years down the track of handling this pandemic, Western Australia has done incredibly well, but at the time people were very grateful. I realise that \$600 might not be a whole lot of money potentially for those in the member for Cottesloe's electorate to pay their electricity bills, but I know that the people in my electorate were very grateful for that support.

I would also like to talk today about privatisation. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the Australian Services Union —

A member interjected.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Thank you; yes.

I acknowledge the Australian Services Union's state secretary, Wayne Wood; the assistant state secretary, Jill Hugo; and the delegates and union members for their commitment to the Use Your Power campaign in the lead-up to the 2017 election. My dear friend Christine Jauncey is a mum and grandmother and also the wife of a power station operator at Muja power station. She stood on the front steps of Parliament House, having never spoken publicly before, and passionately explained to the people of Western Australia that she was prepared to stand up for the workers, Western Power and the people of Western Australia to make sure that Western Power was not privatised. The Use Your Power campaign highlighted the need for Western Power to remain in government hands—in fact, in the hands of the people of Western Australia.

The Barnett government's agenda was totally the opposite. The idea was to privatise Western Power, sell off the assets and cover the huge deficit that it had built up over its time in government. Western Power was going to be the one that paid for its reckless mismanagement of the state's finances. Then, of course, we had Zak Kirkup's Liberals' energy jobs plan in the lead-up to the 2021 election—a policy that made it very clear how poorly members of the opposition understood WA's energy sector. I can honestly say that what our Minister for Energy, Hon Bill Johnston, does not know about the energy sector in Western Australia could just about be written on the back of a postage stamp and still leave room.

At the time, the Liberal member for South West Region, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, commented that the Liberals' energy jobs plan was the stupidest policy he had ever seen the Liberal Party release. That came from a member of its own party in Parliament. Liberal MP Tjorn Sibma said that it was an absolute disaster and made it clear that the Leader of the Liberal Party, Dr David Honey, had made a contribution to that policy. Dr David Honey is now the shadow energy minister.

The criticism of the McGowan government from the opposition on energy policy is misdirected and misguided. It needs to look inwardly at its own policies and reflect on its lack of understanding of key state infrastructure systems like the energy sector. Privatising assets to move to a user-pays system does not work in Western Australia. I will tell members where it would hit the hardest—it would be in the regions. Despite the opposition claiming to fly the flag for regional Western Australia, it is very proudly the fact that the Labor government is absolutely flying the flag for regional areas of Western Australia.

We have a huge challenge with our energy system. We are not the eastern states. Our energy system is a standalone system; we cannot tap into other parts that generate power in the eastern states and supplement each state's power at times of need. Our system is completely isolated and it needs to stand alone. Because of these things, it is an extremely complex system. As some will be aware, my husband works for Muja power station and is a power station controller. I have made jokes about that before, but in all seriousness much of our conversations at home centre around the electricity generation system. I know more about power systems than I ever thought I would. I think, sadly and scarily, if I put my husband and the Minister for Energy in the same room, they would have a lot to talk about. My day, before my eyes are even open, generally starts with being given an update on the Australian Energy Market Operator data, the system capacity, the current system capacity, the weather forecasts and anything else that may be pertinent to the electricity system. The size of our grid is one of the huge complexities of this system. I want

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

to outline the fact that geographically Horizon Power is responsible for the largest geographical catchment of any Australian provider. That is a huge challenge within the system.

A government member: It's actually in the world.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Yes. For Western Power, the south west interconnected system covers over 260 000 square kilometres—an area that is larger than the United Kingdom. All these things are clearly significant challenges that Western Power has to manage.

The member for Nedlands went through a lot of the points I planned to make about privatisation and the fact that privatisation means it is the shareholders who make the decisions about energy systems. In a state as large and diverse as Western Australia, that absolutely cannot be allowed to happen. The people who will miss out are the Western Australians who live in this vast state, particularly in regional areas. I want to remind everybody that the McGowan Labor government is absolutely committed to everybody in Western Australia paying the same price for electricity. That would not be case were we to move to a user-pays or privatised system. I want to briefly highlight the fact that this government is looking towards the future of the energy system. Collie is part of the new plan of what our energy system could look like in the future. With Collie having been the cornerstone of the energy system for over 100 years, the government is investing to make sure that there is a just transition around the coal industry for people living and working in Collie and \$100 million has been set aside by this government, in combination with the Collie Futures industry development fund to diversify away from coal.

I want to highlight two very important projects that have been looked at and funded from that \$100 million: International Graphite and Magnium Australia. Magnium is a magnesium refinery feasibility project and it aims to use renewable energy and CSIRO technology to produce high-purity magnesium, using carbon-neutral technology. Magnesium is actually an incredibly important critical mineral. It is a versatile, high-value metal that can be used in alloys and components, but the smelter proposal for which the feasibility study has been granted aligns with the McGowan Labor government's vision for its future battery and critical minerals industry strategy. That is the link back to the future of our energy system.

The last project I would like to highlight is International Graphite. International Graphite was backed by the McGowan Labor government as part of the just transition process that is looking to diversify the economy for Collie. International Graphite will establish a micronising and graphite foil manufacturing facility in the light industrial area in Collie. The development of the plant will see manufacturing of graphite products for new technologies, including mobile phones, computers, high-pressure sealants and fire-retardant building materials. It is also researching and developing the potential to process graphite to produce anode material for lithium ion batteries. If anybody is interested in what kind of investor interest there is around these new technologies, unfortunately, we all missed the boat. International Graphite launched on 8 March and lodged a prospectus with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. It released up to 50 000 shares at an issue price of 20¢ and it was expected to raise up to \$10 million. It was a sellout, so it made it within a number of days. The investments that this government is making in future technologies is futureproofing our energy system in Western Australia and the energy sector.

I have to add my comments, alongside those of the minister and the other members who have presented today, that I cannot support the condemnation of the McGowan Labor government around our energy system.

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.50 pm]: I also rise, in the time I have left, to make a few brief comments speaking against this motion today, which I think is one of the most laughable. Every now and then, opposition members get up and decide have a bit of a crack on energy policy. It is just not a good look for them. It does not play well. Today was another example. I have been listening very intently to the contributions of my colleagues, the minister and the members of the opposition. I will not say it was uniformly bad from you guys—it really was not—but I have to make some observations on the selective use of facts and the incredibly selective memory of the Leader of the Liberal Party. It should tell the people of Western Australia an awful lot about the capacity of those opposite to prosecute any sort of an argument with any level of credibility on any sort of economic policy issue.

I took some notes about what the Leader of the Liberal Party said. It is a shame that he is not in the chamber because I think he should be accountable for the things he said. He spoke about the brilliant reliability in his own suburb of Cottesloe. He said he could not remember an outage. He could not understand the outages in fringe-of-grid areas. He said that there is nothing particularly special about our electricity network and that there are plenty of other networks around the world that operate in 40-degree centigrade ambient temperature. Either he has a selective memory or an appalling memory, or he is outright acting in a way that would seem to be misleading this Parliament.

He sat on an inquiry that went for over two years looking at the complexities of the Western Australian energy systems—the north west interconnected system, the south west interconnected system and the non-interconnected systems that pepper regional Western Australia. He sat on an inquiry that lasted for over two years, yet he pleads ignorance and he claims to not be able to understand the very specific features of our electricity network that

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

present such challenges to Western Power. It is galling that he seeks to sit there and criticise the very hardworking staff members of Western Power and Horizon Power. It is shameful and it shows a lack of understanding or disingenuousness in the extreme. He knows about our very unique features. He knows because he went through line by line with me and my colleagues the reports for the microgrids inquiry in which we emphasised the highly distributed nature of the south west interconnected system and the fact that, yes, it is very meshed in places like Cottesloe, but in the outer parts of the metropolitan area, it is very dispersed. There are long, very spindly feeders in that part of the world that are susceptible to bushfire, as the member for Scarborough outlined. They are susceptible to bushfires and to possums and birds injuring themselves. They are susceptible to vegetation falling upon them. As the minister pointed out, they are also susceptible to people driving into them. The Leader of the Liberal Party knows that it is extraordinarily expensive to operate and maintain that network, especially at the outer edges of the grid. He knows about the safety and inspection regimes. He should know. Either he does know and he is not being —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Not being honest.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Thank you, minister. It is very hard for me to summon the words about the conduct of the member for Cottesloe because it is disingenuous in the extreme. He knows all of this because, as I say, he sat on the microgrids inquiry alongside me and other members. He sat in a room with me and helped cook up those recommendations about regulations for increased subtransmission visibility and control. He knows that we recommended that Western Power needed visibility. If he bothered to read the minister's response, he would know that the minister accepted those recommendations and has made funding available, allowing Western Power to have that greater visibility and control at the subtransmission level. He knows about the recommendation to introduce a distributed energy resources register. He knows that we recommended that the minister should develop a whole-of-system plan. He knows that we recommended amendments to the Electricity Networks Access Code to enable a more innovative approach to rolling out technologies that would address the very issues that we are talking about today. He knows that the minister accepted that. He knows that we sent a very clear message through that report to the regulator to say, "You have to more accurately consider the challenges of the outer fringes of the network and allow the rollout of the technologies to address it." He knows that the minister accepted that. Yet he still comes into this place and says that nothing was done in response to outages, when he knows that not to be true.

The Leader of the Liberal Party knows that our first report had 11 findings. He knows that there were 73 findings in the second report and 21 recommendations, all of which were accepted by this minister. He sat there and had the opportunity to read 50 submissions on this topic. He sat on a committee that received briefings from the Australian Energy Market Operator, Western Power, Nickel West and Horizon Power. He could have accessed and read the transcripts of the hearings that he was not able to attend. He also participated in hearings or had access to transcripts from over 38 public hearings, when these issues were fleshed out in detail. He said that nothing has been done. He has a selective memory. All those findings and recommendations were accepted. The minister rolled out the energy transformation strategy. Phase 1 has been completed. We have a distributed energy resources road map. We have a whole-of-system plan. The regulatory changes are underway. In July last year, the minister announced the second phase of those changes comprising another \$14.2 million for Energy Policy WA to roll out its changes, continue working on that DER road map, produce a second whole-of-system plan, and also provide support to energy consumers.

The member for Scarborough took us through the many changes and innovations that this government is introducing in the climate change and hydrogen portfolios. They are great policies, and we have full industry support for them. We have thought leadership. In fact, it is so good—members may not know this—that Australia's largest cooperative research centre, RACE for 2030, is studying what we did. Let us contrast that very briefly with the Liberals' absolutely atrocious record. We all recall the \$3 billion—apparently—energy thought bubble that it went to the last election with that was costed at over \$15 billion. We all remember that at the time Minister Wyatt spoke about the three stooges' press conferences, where they were throwing the ticking time bombs. The opposition's position today seems to be to spend. Even though the Leader of the Liberal Party knows it costs \$240 000 per connection at the fringe of grid areas compared with \$10 000 in Cottesloe, his position today seems to be to spend unlimited amounts of money in the regions and somehow somebody has to pay for that. His position seems to be one of unlimited expenditure. We can all see where the Liberal Party went wrong with its \$3 billion costing.

I want to make one quick observation about the member for Moore's position. Perhaps this reveals a bit of a disagreement between the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA, which is saying that the government trading enterprises should cut their expenditure, particularly on marketing and communications, which is what those entities use to communicate to their customers about energy safety, energy cost reductions and how to access hardship grants. The member for Moore is advocating a cut to that. Which is it? The Liberal–National alliance seems to be incredibly dysfunctional. Does it want to go down the member for Cottesloe's path of unlimited irresponsible expenditure, or does it want to cut the very means by which the utilities communicate a safety message to their

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 23 March 2022]

p1316b-1341a

Dr David Honey; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Stuart Aubrey; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw

customers? We are debating a report about safety at the moment and the member is advocating that expenditure on that very same thing be cut.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.