

**WESTERN POWER — MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS — WOODVALE**

*Statement*

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [7.20 pm]: Earlier today during question time I brought up a matter concerning something reasonably routine, nevertheless it is an issue that directly affects the quality of life of people in our community—it was effectively the expectation that they have functioning streetlights at night. Two days ago a matter came to my attention. A gentleman who lived in Acheson Crescent in Woodvale advised me, as he advised a number of other members of the broad North Metropolitan constituency, that in February this year some routine works were conducted by Western Power in his street, which removed a faulty streetlight. About a month later he sought an update from Western Power about when replacement streetlights might be installed and electrified. He was advised at that time that the ordinary practice of Western Power was to remediate the situation within around five working days. In good faith, he took that advice. Nevertheless in following up his inquiries, he was subsequently advised that the remediation of that problem might in fact take a little longer. He sought to understand why a problem he was originally told would take five days to fix had suddenly blown out to something closer to 12 weeks. I might just read some extracts from correspondence this gentleman engaged in with the people at Western Power. He quite rightly asked —

Are you able provide a reason why it takes so long? —

Twelve weeks —

... seems like a long time to be left in the dark.

That is a fair question. This was nearly four or five weeks after the incident occurred. He received some advice that directly contradicts an answer I received today from the responsible minister, the Minister for Energy. This gentleman was advised why the problem was taking so long. The correspondence states —

As we are government funded we do have budget and therefore staffing restrictions which do inhibit our response times to incidents that are no longer classified as emergencies.

That is a significant claim for a customer service person at Western Power to make. I think that advice was pretty accurate and given in good faith.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Member, you should table the letter and I can follow it up for you.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I have addressed the issue and it is being rectified. I am somewhat assured by the minister's claim that this issue, and issues concerning 49 individual cable faults in the broader Woodvale area, will be remediated or repaired by July. It is great that that pledge has been given, but should we need to deal with these issues in a parliamentary setting? If this gentleman had not sought satisfactory recourse from his represented members, how much longer would this situation have continued for? It concerns me that somebody at the customer service coalface in Western Power quite truthfully, I would say, advised an aggrieved customer that they could not get satisfaction earlier, notwithstanding any technical problems, because there were "budget and therefore staffing restrictions". When I asked today whether budget or human resourcing constraints at Western Power were constraining the government trading enterprise's ability to undertake routine maintenance and replacement activities, the Minister for Energy, in an otherwise very helpful and informative response, said no. Who are we to believe? Are we to believe the minister or someone who deals with these complaints on, I would expect, a daily basis, and resolves customer service disputes at the coalface? Was that person incorrect? I tend to side with the person in the customer service division of Western Power who provided the advice that that was the reason. I find it extraordinary that Western Power, a GTE that is largely inoculated from competition and returns 65 per cent of its net profits to the government as a dividend—which is ordinarily well over \$100 million and probably closer to \$200 million—each financial year, and which has a net asset value of over \$2.1 billion, cannot fix streetlights in Woodvale quickly because of budgeting and human resources constraints. I think that sums up the travails of this government since it was elected. It is big on rhetoric and big on hiking —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Table the letter and we can follow it up for you. You are suggesting the minister has lied.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Minister, I will take this interjection and I will respond helpfully. I do not need to table this letter. I will not disclose the personal information of a constituent. If the minister wants to know, he should ask his friend the member for Kingsley. He should ask her what she has done to satisfy this person and about bread-and-butter issues that matter to people.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** She's a great member.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** You might say that. I do not need to table it. If members want the information, they should speak to her. She will give it to them. She has exactly the same information as I have. I do not know what she has done. If it were not for me bringing this to Parliament's attention, I do not think there would be a time line and there would be absolutely no justification given about why a simple matter is taking so long.

