

## ELECTRICITY — OUTAGES

### *Matter of Public Interest*

**THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price)** informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [2.53 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Minister for Energy for mismanaging our electricity system including that he is unable to satisfy Western Australian families, businesses and others that they will not again suffer through blackouts and reliability failures during the coming Christmas and summer period.

During the last sitting of Parliament, we moved a motion condemning the Minister for Energy for his failure to reverse the growing problems within Western Australia's electricity system. In that debate, I set out seven problem areas that the minister has not addressed properly. Those seven problem areas were failing to make any notable progress to reverse the declining reliability of electricity supplies, especially in rural and metropolitan semirural areas; failing to respond in a tangible manner to the Christmas outages review recommendations for improving grid reliability in rural areas; failing to resolve the problems around timely repair of electricity outages due to bushfire rules enacted by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; failing to ensure goldfields power is maintained by use of the available Kalgoorlie backup power generators; failing to publicly release Labor's plan for the future of our energy system without the assurance that our coal-powered generators will be available; failing to ensure that Premier Coal has met its contractual commitments to maintain coal supply to our coal-fired power plants; and denying rural and regional communities the benefit of modern life by the sudden imposition earlier this year of rules demanding that switch limiters be installed on buildings that have solar panels attached.

The minister had his chance to respond to those concerns, yet the minister has failed to provide meaningful answers or solutions to all of those problems, bar one. The one problem that the minister can say he has taken steps to address is the provision of backup power for Kalgoorlie. The minister can now say that Synergy will turn on the backup power at all times when Kalgoorlie is affected by power outages. However, that was only after that matter had been raised by me and community members. As I have said, the minister cannot take any kudos for resolving that issue; it was resolved only because of the political pressure that had been placed upon him. The reality is that when that issue was raised in this place, the minister continued to say that it could not be done in a timely manner. We knew that was not the case, and I held a public meeting at which that was reinforced by the engineers, and shortly afterwards the processes in Western Power were changed.

We have not seen any improvement on the issue of making notable progress on reversing the declining reliability of our electricity supply, especially in rural and metropolitan semirural areas. I have been through the statistics in some detail and I will not go through them again in this place. However, we can see from Western Power's own statistics that there has been a material decline in the life of nearly all the critical components in our electricity system. That is completely opposed to what happened under the former Liberal–National coalition government. The data shows that when the electricity system was under our government's tenure, we increased the life of those critical components to ensure the reliability of our electricity network. As I pointed out at the time, it is no wonder that the reliability of our power system is getting worse and worse. The evidence in those statistics is unequivocal. We have asked some questions in the other place about the 1.5 million power outages that occurred last year under this minister. The minister does not seem perturbed by that. The minister comes into this place and says, "Everything is fine. Everything is right. Yes, we can expect some outages, but we have 99-point-whatever per cent reliability in the network." Instead of that, we are seeing a materially worsening experience for households, particularly in regional areas. I have taken members through reports that show the declining age of critical assets such as switchgear, insulators and transformers. There is a stark difference. It is crystal clear that this government has not invested the money and has not made the commitment that it needs to make to improve the system.

We hear the minister say that because they realised there was a problem last Christmas, they suddenly made some improvements to the system but, as I will go through in a little bit of detail, where is the evidence for that? Of course, the real test is going to be this summer. When I talk to senior figures who are involved in the energy industry, they say they expect to see a worse outcome this summer than last summer. We do not have a crystal ball. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Given that this summer is likely to be a hot summer, we will soon see the truth of the minister's words. The minister claims to have responded to the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages: Final Report*—the Shepherd report. I want to go through that report. The damning lines on page 14, which goes through the data, read —

This data shows over a four-year period a 'materially' worsening customer outage experience trend in CBD and rural areas, with flat performance in urban areas.

In large part, that is under the tenure of this minister. As I said, the minister comes into this place and, apart from gratuitous insults towards me, says “Everything’s fine. We should expect a bit, but don’t worry about it.” However, the failures are in critical areas. The minister comes into this place and says, “It’s not me; I don’t run it.” It is a bit of a parallel to the criticism the Labor Party made of former Prime Minister Scott Morrison saying, “I don’t hold a hose”. The minister says, “They run it. I’m not really responsible.” The buck stops with the minister. The minister has the responsibility to guarantee, as best as possible, that we have a reliable power network. The minister loves to go on and talk about climate change. He loves to talk about various prognostications about preparing for renewables and batteries and the challenges of balancing power and the like. That is the job the minister has; that is his job.

**Ms J.J. Shaw** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is the job that governments have had for some time as we transition into renewables. As the member for Swan Hills would know, this transition has been on for some time. It is not something that has just occurred. As I say, this is the minister’s routine response and those are his words. The nub of the matter is that this has got worse under his government. It may be very interesting to go through all those factors, talk about them and discuss them, but that is the minister’s job. The minister’s job is to ensure, as far as humanly possible, that we have a reliable power network. It is fine giving lectures about electrons, where power goes and where power does not go and the like, but that does not hide the minister’s job. There is obviously an important transition going on and there is room for investment in new technology and accommodating the renewables that are coming into the network, but that should not be at the expense of reliability in the system that we have already.

In the last debate, I raised the issue of the recommendations from the independent review into the Christmas outages. There were two issues, one of which I asked a question about today. The issues are to improve reliability and reduce frequency and duration of outages, particularly in rural or peri-urban areas. The issues I raised were the government failing to respond in a tangible manner to the Christmas outage review recommendations to improve grid reliability in rural areas and failing to resolve problems around timely repair of electricity outages due to bushfire rules enacted by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. It was fascinating.

I had a look at the website of Eco Logical Australia, and I am certain that the people in Eco Logical are fine environmental scientists and fine policy people, but if, in fact, the minister read their blurb on bushfires—I am not seeking to criticise them here—he would see that their expertise is in policy and in the recovery of areas after bushfires. I will not dwell on that point. I do not wish in any sense to decry Eco Logical. It looks like a fine organisation. However, many people are experts in bushfires and how to prevent and manage bushfires and, I would have thought, they would have been more appropriate. The minister said it was only the department but, again, he says it would be corrupt for him to do it and so on, but he is the minister. He is here to make sure the appropriate people are there. He can get information from the department. He can give direction to the department if he does not think that is proper. The idea that somehow the minister is just some mute hand, here only to turn up to openings of things but with no capacity for direction is wrong. In fact, he has given direction. He has said before that he has given direction, so he does have input into it.

The first point I raised about the minister’s failure to respond was addressed by a simple recommendation. It was that Western Power assess the grid in areas with regular problems, compile plans for how it intends to fix the problems and indicate when that will happen. The minister has come into this place and said, “Yes, repairs have been done” but we have seen no information. No information has been given to the community or the public. Where has this been done? Has it been done in Quairading, for example? Has it been done for Roleystone, which seems to suffer continual power outages? A number of coastal locations up towards Geraldton have dreadful power reliability. We saw the terrible power problems and power reliability in Walkaway. Have those problems been addressed? We have no way of knowing. The gold-standard transparency we are supposed to see from this government is not evident. We have not seen the plans. We have no way of tracking whether Western Power, as an agent of the government, is carrying out those plans. What tangible improvements have taken place? Nothing. We have no transparency into that at all, just the minister asserting, “Don’t worry. Everything’s okay; everything’s going to better this summer.” The proof of the pudding is in the eating; that is, do we have those plans? At best, this is a muted response from the minister. The minister says he has done it but there is no proof. There is nothing measurable. There is nothing that the minister, through Western Power, can be held accountable for. Other comments have been made about climate modelling and so on but we do not need to see grand statements of intent. We just need to see the detail of the plan and its delivery.

The second critical point in the Christmas outage report concerned the unduly long time it takes to restore power. The minister is right that it is not the only problem, but these issues were almost a year ago. The minister might say it is a minor thing, but the Shepherd inquiry saw fit to raise it as a significant issue that needed resolution. Clearly, no-one wants Western Power to go out willy-nilly and needlessly start fires, but we have heard on a number of occasions, in areas where adequate firefighting resources are available, where the fire risk is absolutely minimal, Western Power crews have not been able to go out because of the protocol. Again, we hear the minister say it is being changed and being planned but where is the detail? Having meetings with some shires is not being explicit

and transparent with the community. We have no certainty whatsoever that we are going to see any tangible change. Why does that have an impact? It has an impact because, on high fire-risk days, crews are not able to go out and do their work because of the protocol. We hear that the protocol adopted by Western Power was overwhelmingly the most stringent protocol in Australia and that there was no necessity to take the extreme measures that it did. Repairs could safely be carried out using a different approach. That is what we are looking for from the minister but, once again, there is no transparency. We get no detail. It is clear that those procedures are not finalised. They are not locked in. Here we are, coming into another hot Christmas period, and we have seen nothing.

The community has a right to know the implementation of that plan, what has occurred and what has been done. When I go through Western Power's summary in response to the Shepherd report, I read—yes, I read, minister—a whole heap of intentions, but very little of any tangible, physical response to say that Western Power has done that, fixed it and here is the plan. We get words like —

Over the longer term, Western Power will incorporate improvements in the fire response procedures ...

What is that? It is like *Yes Minister* on steroids. That is not a tangible or meaningful response; it is just a form of administrative speak and does not mean anything. Western Power is still working on it, but the minister needs to guarantee—which is what I asked today—that we will see a tangible difference. I do not want the minister to guarantee that there will not be bushfires. I want the minister to guarantee that there will be a tangible difference. As I have said, we see no transparency from this government and this minister, who is happy to hand out gratuitous insults to me and anyone else who dares to ask him a question from this side. We do not see the straight, honest and open detail coming to this place.

To go to a couple of other points on that list of issues, it refers to the failure to publicly release Labor's plan for the future of our energy system without the insurance of coal-powered generators being available and failing to ensure that Premier Coal meets its contractual commitments to supply coal for our coal-fired power plants. We hear the minister say that there is nothing to see here and nothing he can do because he does not direct the contracts, and so on, but, of course, the minister absolutely has responsibility. He can absolutely give written direction—and that is what we ultimately saw. The minister said that he can do nothing, but then the minister comes into this place and says that he has had discussions, and Premier Coal has embarked on a plan to import coal from the eastern states. It would appear that they are literally bringing coal here from Newcastle. The minister could have done that all along. The government has contractual force. The minister asks whether I want him to bankrupt the company. Clearly, no-one does, but the contract gives the minister the power to have those discussions with the company and to direct Western Power to have those discussions with the company and ensure a satisfactory resolution. The minister then has the opportunity to review the plans and say whether he feels the plans are appropriate. We go through a litany of excuses about why there was no coal supply. We now have the ludicrous situation in which it sounds like at least \$40 million will be spent on coal. For some reason, the minister says he cannot say how much money will be spent, and we do not hear anything about where that will be paid from.

Again, there is no transparency. The “gold-standard transparency” is completely inadequate. A situation became apparent yesterday; Santos's Varanus Island operation has dropped 150 terajoules of gas from the system for four to six weeks. Who knows? It could be longer. That is almost 20 per cent of the gas supply capacity of that network. We are told not to worry; there is nothing to see here. This absolutely highlights the vulnerability the minister is putting us in. We hear whispers that the minister might not be the biggest fan of this cabinet decision, but the closure of the government's Collie power station and the cessation of the Bluewaters contract in 2030 mean that this state will effectively be completely dependent on one source for its major firming capacity on gas. We will go from a situation in which we had reliability in our power network from two sources—if one source was not there, the other was the backup—to 40 per cent of our electricity generation firming capacity in the network now disappearing under this minister's watch. He will plunge us into a situation in which we are utterly dependent on gas for firming capacity. He talks about batteries and other things, but they are immaterial when it comes to long-term firming capacity in the network.

I want to give other members a chance to speak on this matter, but it is very clear that this minister is not transparent and is overseeing a material worsening of the reliability of our electricity network. Nothing the minister has said gives me any confidence that we will see an improved performance this summer.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [3.15 pm]: I rise to support the motion. I talk from a regional perspective about the importance of energy and power supplies in the regions. As the member for Cottesloe just pointed out, many of our regions—across the north west, potentially across the south west and in other regional areas—face the huge prospect of having significant issues with bushfires and heatwaves. It heightens and brings to the surface the issues we will have with power and the impacts that will have on people who live in the bush. The further we get from Perth, the greater the challenges we will have.

Robust infrastructure, which we have touched on, is an ongoing development that is vital to our regions. The Kalbarri microgrid has been worked on, and no doubt it has shortened and reduced the number of outages, but in

no way has it fixed the problem to the level that we need. I spoke with one caravan park owner in October, and he commented that he believes it is still a bandaaid fix. He has had up to two dozen outages in the last six to nine months, with no compensation for loss. Unless the outage is 12 hours or more, there is no compensation. He made the point that infrastructure robustness is crucial to his business and to small businesses across the regions, and it is often overlooked.

The prolonged and intermittent outages are detrimental to the reputation of these businesses. The outages interrupt their trade and their products. The businesses do not have products available, and their freezers go off. They lose products and have to replace them, so it is a significant cost to them all. When tourism businesses have people staying with them and the power goes out, the pool system goes down and it is a two-day turnaround before they can turn the pool back on. It is not a good look in the middle of summer. It is not good for tourism businesses or their guests, who will definitely not return. Guests cannot cook or use the facilities, and the air conditioners are off, which can be the worst part of the situation in the north west. It is crucially important that we get these infrastructure issues ironed out, particularly in the high-risk areas.

The other thing coming to the forefront is access to power poles in some of these areas. This has been an issue during fire bans. I understand it has been addressed in Western Power's response to the Shepherd report. If the power goes out in places like Kalbarri, which have a three-hour to four-hour battery backup, there is still the potential for very long power outages. Many people have kitted themselves out with generators, but a large number of people cannot afford to or have been unable to do that. The cost of diesel or fuel to run the generators is significant and something that other people do not need to consider.

Not having power in these areas is huge. A knock-on effect is communication. People are extremely vulnerable without communication, and it is a large risk to people's safety. Coupled with that are the medical issues; some people rely on renal dialysis at home and have various medical requirements that rely on these power sources.

I know that Kalbarri residents got text messages requesting that they reduce their power consumption, which is an improvement, but I do not think that this will stand up over the summer. It is a serious issue, especially on a 40-degree day, when the pressure on the system is significant and the three to four hours of battery backup fades into insignificance. The larger businesses that rely on these robust power supplies still suffer from time to time and they also have to incur the costs that go with it.

Another consideration for power supplies in the north west is the solar eclipse on 23 April next year and how power generation might be impacted in the region. Thousands of people are expected to travel to the region. I know that people are already receiving bookings in the lead-up, and it is two to three months out.

We ask the minister to, firstly, give us confidence that he will mitigate any risk that these events will not have adequate power supplies and, secondly, ensure that communication in those regions will not be affected. The communication risk is just as important throughout the season, particularly with the bushfires that are on the horizon. Last year, over a million acres of pastoral areas were burnt, and that caused significant grief for a lot of people. We were lucky that we had no incidents of people being injured. During the times when the populations of towns such as Shark Bay swell from 700 to 7 000 people, reliable power sources are crucial.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.21 pm]: This is a very important motion to debate as we head into summer. There were clearly issues last summer and it does not appear that a great deal has been done to strengthen the network in the interim. The issues that the member for North West Central raised have been raised on multiple occasions in this house. It is concerning that we are entering another summer period with the anxiety and the reality that there are multiple interruptions to service, particularly in regional Western Australia.

I want to put on the record that the member for Moore is not in Parliament today. He has a case of laryngitis, which is a bit challenging for a member of Parliament.

We moved a motion on power and energy reliability in March. The minister will recall that I raised issues about Quairading and the desire by the North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils to have distributed generation and renewables and to reduce some of the challenges that are faced on the edge of the grid.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** I responded.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** And the minister responded; he went to Quairading. I would like to put on the record on behalf of the member for Moore his concern that the issues that he raised on 23 March do not seem to have been addressed and there is still some considerable work to be done.

For those who are interested and are looking for the evidence that there is a real reason for the opposition to continue raising this issue, they can look at the network reliability data on the Western Power website, which is concerning. For the Shire of Northampton, some of the key statistics include an average time without power per customer of 65 hours and 36 minutes in 2021–22. That is down from a whopping 397 hours, but it is still not great for those who live in the Shire of Northampton. The average number of interruptions per customer was 21 in 2021–22, which is up from nine. The interruptions are almost as destructive as the complete blackouts, because they ruin electrical

goods. As I understand it, the brownouts do not get recorded as part of Western Power's Economic Regulation Authority requirements, so there is no necessity to fix it. In the Shire of Perenjori, the average time without power was 72 hours and four minutes in 2021–22 and there were 13 interruptions per customer. In the Shire of Chapman Valley, the average time was 56 hours and 26 minutes, which is still significant. This has an impact on the way that we live, the way that we do business and the way that we keep our communities safe. That is why we will continue to raise the issue in Parliament on behalf of our constituents.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy)** [3.24 pm]: I want to address an issue here, and that is the question of the approach of members opposite. I must say that Nationals WA members raise genuine issues, and that is why I respond in a practical way to each of the issues they raise. That is why I was happy to go to Quairading and to meet with the North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils on two occasions. That is why I have asked Western Power and Synergy to engage with Quairading and NEWROC to see whether they can come up with a solution that works. The problem for both of them was that they were being sold a pup by a private company that was not a solution.

The reason that the Leader of the Opposition could quote those statistics is that they are on the Western Power website, so that actually goes to the question of transparency. Western Power provides more data about the outcomes for the transmission system than any other network service provider in Australia. It is the only NSP that provides data at that granular level. It is not required by the ERA because the ERA requires averages to be reported. As I have said before, the problem with averages is that they encourage us to spend in the larger centres. The whole reason we are doing it in this way—only now, since I have been minister, has it been done in this way—is so that we can spend the money in the most unreliable locations. Under the previous government, Western Power was encouraged to spend more money in the larger centres. The member for Cottesloe talked about the decline in the outage performance in the CBD, but that is because the CBD performance is so strict that a single outage leads it to fall outside the performance standards. That is why these things are explained—so that we are transparent. It is actually the opposite of what the member for Cottesloe said.

The member for Cottesloe also said that there are no tangible differences. Actually, there are tangible differences. Look at what we are doing in each of these locations. I make the point that on every occasion that the shadow minister has asked for a briefing on these issues from Western Power, it has been granted to him. Do members know how many times that has been? None, because he has never sought a briefing! He cannot complain that he does not have information when he does not ask for it. He comes in here and whinges about things that he does not know about and then he expects me to take him seriously. That is completely different from the Leader of the Opposition, who comes in here and raises specific issues about specific things on behalf of her constituents, and I respond to her. I go and visit the towns. I go and talk to the people. The stuff with Northampton that the member for Moore raised is a real problem. We are spending all this money reconfiguring the network in the area to improve reliability. It is still going to be a problem, because that part of the world is a great place to live, but it is hard to provide electricity to it. We spent \$13 million on the microgrid at Kalbarri. It has significantly reduced the number of outages in Kalbarri. It is not a 100 per cent solution, because there are no 100 per cent solutions. The other members of the member for North West Central's community are covered by Horizon, not Western Power, so the issues that we are discussing at the moment are not relevant.

The member for Cottesloe went on about the closure of coal, as though coal is firming up technology for renewable energy. The member just does not get this. Coal cannot be used to firm up renewables because it cannot respond to the ramp rates that are required by renewables. If he had a briefing on this, we could explain it to him. The member implied that somehow I was not supportive of the decision to close the next wave of coal-fired power stations. I was the one who asked the Premier for approval to do this project. I was the one who took it to cabinet. I have said this in the chamber on many occasions, and I also said it to the workforce in Collie, because we made the announcement with the workforce in Collie; we did not put it out as a press release like the member did when he was responsible for that silly policy at the last election. I explained to them that rooftop solar is driving out coal because, unlike gas, which is good at ramping, coal does not ramp well. That means to go up and down in power delivery. We are moving coal out of the system not because of carbon emissions, but because of rooftop solar. I have said this a hundred times to everybody I talk to, and everybody who listens would know that. Maybe the member should take a hint.

The member said, "The minister says, 'Nothing to see here.'" When? This is typical of the member for Cottesloe; he just comes in and asserts things that are not true. That is just incorrect. I say that it is a complex system and there are complex solutions, and it is not 100 per cent reliable. It is one of the most reliable grids in the world, with 99.1 per cent reliability. That is unbelievable. I looked just the other day and saw that 1.7 per cent of Qantas flights in the last month were cancelled. If we had that level of reliability, thousands more people in Western Australia would be without power. This is one of the most reliable machines in the world, and I do not know why the member criticises it the way he does.

The Leader of the Liberal Party said I have never addressed seven issues, including reliability of supply. I do not understand how I can be more transparent than requiring Western Power to provide greater transparency on its reliability.

Another issue was the response to outages. How many times do I have to come in here and say exactly the same things about the challenges of outages? I have tabled reports. I have gone to press conferences. I have come in here and answered questions. I have answered dozens of questions in the upper house. Why does the member not get a briefing on any of those things?

Another issue that the member mentioned was repair times. What is he referring to? If it is a case of car versus pole, that is not Western Power's fault. The member thinks that the reason there are outages is that Western Power is unreliable, but there are 100 different issues. The member also went on about blackouts. There has not been a blackout in Western Australia for years. The member is talking about outages when there is a mechanical failure in the distribution system.

The member talked about the goldfields. I have told the member a hundred times—I keep telling him—that it is not about the response time of the gas-fired power station; it is about the need to slowly reconnect the load. The member was told this when he visited the Synergy plant in Kalgoorlie. The engineers explained it to the member. I do not understand why the member did not understand what they told him. They told the member that it is not how long it takes for the power station to shoot up. It is about 15 or 16 minutes, and that is done by a guy with a laptop. It is not done by a person on site pressing a button. It takes about 15 or 16 minutes to get it up. The reason it takes time is that we have to slowly try to reconnect the load. The member has been told that a hundred times, and I do not understand why the member cannot get that.

The member also talked about our future. We have the most advanced future program for the retirement of the coal-fired power stations. Other states are following our lead. We have set out in detail what we are doing: 820 megawatts of wind and 4 400 megawatt hours of storage, with 1 100 megawatts of capacity for the storage. I have said that hundreds of times. I said it at the press conference when we announced the closure of the station. I said it in reply to government backbenchers' questions in this chamber. I said it in reply to questions from the Leader of the Liberal Party. If the member wants to know which project and where it is going, that is a separate question. Synergy is working through the commercial arrangements for individual pieces of kit. We know what we are going to achieve. We have seven years to do it and we are working through it nice and slowly to make sure that it comes on.

Then there is the issue about Premier Coal. The member said that I have the power to direct Western Power. Western Power does not have the contract with Premier. Synergy has the contract with Premier, not Western Power. Yes, I have powers to direct Synergy; I do not have powers to direct Premier. I asked Synergy, long before this issue was in public, to work through the coal supply questions and come up with a solution, and it did. As I have said in public before, in the media and in this chamber lots of times, the plan is that Premier Coal, which is owned by Yancoal of China, will have its related entity Yancoal Australia provide 100 000 tonnes of coal. I do not understand how the member says that is not transparent.

Then the member talked about the cost of the coal. I have said previously that we are paying the market price for coal. The market price is the market price. The member then asked about where the money is coming from. We do not know the exact net effect of the purchase of coal, so one of the examples that the member needs to understand is that coal from the east coast has a higher energy content and a higher ash content, so the coal cannot just go into the power station; it has to be mixed with existing coal from Premier because, otherwise, it cannot be burnt in the power station. There is a range of reasons for that, including regulatory reasons. At the end of the process, we will know what the net effect has been on that, because we do not know what the market price will be because the market price is set in a dynamic fashion. It is not the gross cost, but the net cost that will be the extra cost for which the government of Western Australia will subsidise Synergy, and we do not know what it will be until later. There is no lack of transparency. If the member asks the right question, he will get an explanation.

The member referred to regional consumers. I have regularly been to regional Western Australia to talk to people about energy issues. I always accept responsibility for the energy supply and when things fall below expectations, I apologise and take responsibility for that. It is the complete opposite of what the member for Cottesloe says that I do. He talks about questions in here. I answer all his questions; it is just that sometimes he does not know what he is asking! It beggars belief how little work the member does. There is nothing that the member would like to know that he cannot find out from a briefing, a question on notice or reading an annual report. Why does the member not do any of those things?

The member asked a silly question at question time today about Eco Logical. He has now gone to Eco Logical's website and seen it and acknowledged that he was wrong. The member said in his contribution that he acknowledged that Eco Logical had experience in dealing with bushfires. Then he said, "The minister runs away from responsibility." No, obviously I would not have agreed to Energy Policy WA choosing a consulting firm that was not capable of doing the work. I said that I could not direct EPWA to choose one business over another. If I was not satisfied that Eco Logical, which I have met with, was up to the job, obviously, I would have taken different action. But the point is that I think that Energy Policy WA chose well, and I am satisfied that it was able to do the work that was needed. If the member does not agree with that, he should have said so. If he wants to attack this company, that is up to him, but I am not going to do that.

The member really just needs to do a little bit of work. That is all he needs to do. It is interesting what people outside this room say about us. The member should go and ask the DomGas Alliance whether it thinks the government of Western Australia is doing a good job of managing the energy system in Western Australia. Go and ask the Independent Power Association. Go and ask Jeff Dimery, the chief executive officer of Alinta Energy, whether he thinks that we are doing a good job in Western Australia. The member should go and ask these people who are involved in the system, rather than just flapping his gums; go and do some work and talk to real people.

We would think from the commentary of the Liberal Party that Western Australia's electricity prices are the highest in the world. People forget that our prices are lower than those of all the mainland states and the future increase in electricity prices in Western Australia is going to be 2.5 per cent. On the east coast, people are talking about a 57 per cent increase on a price that is already above the price in Western Australia. The price in Germany is 70¢ a kilowatt hour for residential consumers. That is nearly two and a half times higher than the price of electricity in Western Australia. We have some of the cheapest residential electricity prices and some of the cheapest industrial prices. That is why large industrial users are moving to Western Australia—to take advantage of our low costs. That is why we can expect to have an unbelievable level of investment in renewable energy in Western Australia. That is why we are working with large investors on trying to create an integrated grid in the north west so that we have a north west interconnected system. It is just about 100 per cent the opposite of everything that the member for Cottesloe goes on about.

I feel sorry for people who take the member for Cottesloe seriously. He does not know what he is talking about. He says to stop criticising him. I am not going to stop criticising him when he makes these silly comments about things he does not understand. He should ask for a briefing. I was the shadow minister for five years, so I know how hard it is to be a shadow minister and I know how hard I had to work. The member should do the same. He should ask for a briefing. He should ask to speak to the people who run the businesses—Synergy, Western Power and Horizon Power. Do not talk to the Australian Energy Market Operator; go and listen to AEMO. Remember, he criticised us for our plan to close the coal-fired power stations. AEMO does not agree with him. AEMO put out a media release endorsing the government's approach to their closure.

The member for Cottesloe talked about the Santos outage. He did not ask a single question in question time about the outage at Santos. I make the point that Santos is not controlled by the government of Western Australia. The problem for Santos is in commonwealth waters regulated by the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority, not in state waters regulated by the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. The outage is a problem; there is no question about that. However, unlike in 2007, there are now 11 points of presence for gas supply on the system, so we are not dependent on an individual point of supply. A number of existing points of supply are not fully utilised and, therefore, Santos can ramp up its production to cover shortages from the short deliveries from Varanus Island. Indeed, I understand that Devil Creek, which is also owned by Santos, is currently supplying above its formal capacity.

By the way, this is publicly available information. If the member goes to the AEMO website and looks at the gas bulletin board, which shows the flow of gas out of the production facilities and all the pipelines in Western Australia, he will see that they are “green”. The bulletin board shows that the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline is green at the minute, which means there is no challenge to the supply of gas coming down the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline. Also, we have two storage facilities in Western Australia, so even if we had a larger outage, we would be able to make withdrawals from the two storage facilities. Clearly, we would not want to make withdrawals over a long period, but we would be able to compensate for the challenges from Santos. Private sector gas operators are currently supplying the market to make up the shortages from the Santos outage. As I say, do not believe me—look at the AEMO website, because it is publicly available information. Again, the member has the idea that somehow the government is not being transparent—it is not being transparent because it is only putting it on the World Wide Web! That is unfortunate, because the member would then have to look up the information to find it. I apologise that I have not personally delivered the information to him, even though he has never asked me a question and I expect him to look at what is available on the World Wide Web. I mean, just get a grip!

**MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary)** [3.42 pm]: Every time the Minister for Energy gets on his feet, I learn something new—I do! He keeps asking how many times he has to get on his feet to repeat things over and again. I would say to keep on doing it, because it is quite an educational experience for everyone and it underlines the Minister for Energy's credibility.

I want to talk about credibility today, because it is something that really needs to be covered off in this debate. In fact, when I was thinking about today's debate, I noted that today is 29 November, but I could be forgiven for thinking it was 2 February. Does anybody know what 2 February is?

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Groundhog Day.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Groundhog Day, exactly!

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Do you know what 29 November is?

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** No.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** My daughter's birthday.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Happy birthday to the minister's daughter. Thankfully, she was not born on Groundhog Day; otherwise, she might go back in for six weeks!

Groundhog Day! I wonder whether the Leader of the Liberal Party will come out, take a look at his shadow, turn around and run back into his burrow for six weeks. Maybe if he did that, he might be able to come up with some new material. I genuinely suspect that one of the reasons we have to keep having these debates, these banal discussions, over and over and over again is that the work is not being done and new material is not being presented. There is no fresh thinking, because the last time they tried that we all saw what a disaster that was! There is no fresh thinking. I suggest that maybe the Leader of the Liberal Party take a look at his shadow, go back into his burrow, come up with some new material and maybe have a crack at some genuine energy policy issues, because we know there are some changes underway. The member knows that.

In my last contribution on this very same topic—it is like groundhog day—I was just getting into my groove, I suppose, by talking about the way the member for Cottesloe had participated in the microgrids inquiry and the fact that he really should know better, and I was just starting to talk about credibility. The member shows a complete absence of credibility. The member said that the state government has not invested in or taken steps to improve the system since it came into government. The member asked where there was evidence for that. If he only read the *Hansard* from 19 October, when we last debated this, he would find that the minister delivered on this—for nearly an hour, was it, minister? The minister ran through dozens of things that this government has done to address the significant challenges that are underway in energy policy. Moreover, when the Leader of the Liberal Party said there was no transparency about performance, the minister pointed out that Western Australia is the only jurisdiction in the world that produces and publishes very granular, feeder level performance data. It is transparent. The Leader of the Liberal Party just has to go and look for it. He could look at Western Power's submissions to the access arrangements to understand how it intends to undertake its asset management framework. He could look at annual reports. He could even look at the fact that we commissioned the Shepherd review, which showed that not only is this government very interested in this issue, but also, in fact, it is a driving concern of this government to ensure that it does the very best it can to understand the challenges in the energy sector and then meaningfully address them, so much so that the government released the *Distributed energy resources roadmap*. The government prepared the whole-of-system plan in lockstep with industry and is working collaboratively with industry. The government is very happy to have conversations about what is going on because it has credibility.

I will not even dignify the comments made about coal as firming renewables, because, again, that goes to credibility and demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of how the capacity stack operates or the role of different forms of generation in an energy system. If the Leader of the Liberal Party knew anything about that, he would appreciate that trying to rely on coal decreases reliability and increases cost. His ideas fundamentally work against the very thing he says we should be aiming for, which is a more reliable, cost-effective energy system. It was yet another unedifying performance. Every day, whenever he brings up these issues, he strengthens the case for my friend, the member for Vasse, to take over as the Leader of the Liberal Party. I think that would be a real upgrade.

As I say, on 19 October, the minister went through everything the government has done to improve the performance of the energy system. On that very same day, I talked through what the government was doing. I referred to the Liberal's energy policy thought bubble. I was just getting into it when the member for Cockburn sat me down, which I have not forgiven him for yet. I spoke about the three wise monkeys press release, but I misspoke because it was the Three Stooges! I did misspeak. Let me briefly recap, because I feel like getting into it. Let us talk about the Liberal Party's energy policy—its absolutely crazy 20 February announcement of having zero carbon emissions by 2030; delivering 100 per cent clean energy to Western Australian homes; having a \$3 billion, 1 500 megawatt renewable energy project by 2025; closing all state-owned coal-fired power stations by 2025; developing a \$500 million, 330 kilovolt transmission line from Three Springs to Geraldton; having a 500 megawatt battery; building some EV and hydrogen refuelling stations; making some public transport and state vehicle fleet announcements; and delivering a \$9 billion, 4.5 gigawatt renewable energy export project between Geraldton and Shark Bay that would use renewable energy to convert water into hydrogen. That is where I got to in my last speech. The member for Cottesloe was the architect of and expert behind the Liberal Party's energy policy and the plan to shut down Collie. I am quite sure the new member for Collie—Preston is incredibly relieved that the Liberals did not manage to win government. At a media conference on 11 February 2021, the member for Cottesloe said —

I am extremely excited to be a part of this announcement. This policy is really the next phase of industrial development in the state of Western Australia.

In a media conference on 12 February, backing in the plan, the member said —

The truth is our policy is a well thought out policy and a policy that can provide stable, safe and cheap energy for the people of Western Australia.



Zak Kirkup backed his man in and said, “Dr Honey is the expert in this area.” At the time, as the minister pointed out, the new energy jobs plan was completely unrealistic. It was slated to cost taxpayers somewhere in the order of \$16 billion. It would have resulted in major job losses, particularly in Collie. It would have increased power bills and led to rolling blackouts across WA. Even former Liberal Treasurer Mike Nahan, who, as I have previously said, I have a lot of respect for, labelled the policy “an embarrassing joke”.

We are on the way to transitioning to 100 per cent renewable energy, but we are doing it with a sensible, measured plan with a distributed energy road map and our whole-of-system plan in lock step with industry. We are not coming up with random thought bubbles that threaten to undermine the safety and reliability of the whole system. The unrealistic time frames and blackouts that would have been caused by the Liberal Party are just astonishing. It said a lot about its lack of technical knowledge and understanding. It undermined its credibility. It would have been disastrous. The Australian Energy Market Operator said that there would be blackouts if Muja was closed by 2025. It said that transporting additional electricity from the midwest using Western Power’s existing network is physically impossible and that the Liberals had not factored in the quantity of renewables required to achieve even its loose idea of zero emissions, plus batteries or major upgrades needed to transition. Its plan also rested on privatisation. It cannot let go of privatisation. The Grattan Institute produced reports to indicate that on the east coast, where privatisation has been let run loose, people were paying somewhere between 16 to 20 per cent more for their electricity, and we all know that that situation is now even worse. What did everybody have to say about that? As I said, the then Treasurer Ben Wyatt said of the press conference when the policy was announced —

“It was like watching ... the Three Stooges pass around a ticking time bomb,” ...

“Sean L’Estrange didn’t want to talk about it, Zak Kirkup didn’t understand it, and David Honey threw himself upon it.

“I have never seen anything so bad around a signature policy announced by any political party.”

The then federal energy minister, Angus Taylor, criticised the plan, saying that governments should be focused on helping businesses upgrade to energy-efficient technologies. He thought it was rubbish. The Shire of Collie president, Sarah Stanley, also questioned the proposal’s time frames and said that the technology just does not exist today to do what the Liberal Party wanted to do. She said —

“WA needs reliable power and we just don’t have the technology ...

She was worried about the early closure of the Collie power station. The CEO of the Australian Energy Council agreed that the plan was unrealistic. The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association WA director, Claire Wilkinson, said that the proposal lacked detail and she encouraged the Liberals to actually engage with industry. How about that? I think some of the most choice comments actually came from the Liberal Party. On 16 February 2021, *The Australian*’s Paul Garvey, said —

Several Liberal MPs contacted by The Australian say they are angry and confused by the policy, which they say was introduced without consultation and could make it harder to hold ground at the upcoming election.

...

The energy policy has exasperated MPs, who believe the party should be focused on trying to “save the furniture” at next month’s election.

How did that work out?

On 23 February, *The West Australian* reported that former Minister for Energy Mike Nahan wrote the plan was “worse than Colin’s canal”, a reference to former Premier Colin Barnett’s 2005 election promise to transport water from the Kimberley to Perth. That was leaked, which just goes to show that it is still not a very tight ship over there. Andrew Hastie said that the policy was a lemon. The choicest remark is from Hon Dr Steve Thomas, who said —

“That energy policy was the stupidest policy I have ever seen the Liberal Party release,” ...

“It makes the Alexander Downer, ‘The Things That Batter’ domestic violence policy, look sensible by comparison.”

...

“The expectations that thousands of Greens supporters would suddenly jump onto the Liberal Party bus because of this greener-than-green policy was foolish politics,” ...

“But it also shredded our already damaged credibility —

There is that word again —

because it was utterly undeliverable.

...

**Extract from *Hansard***  
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 29 November 2022]  
p6053b-6062a

Dr David Honey; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Jessica Shaw

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“You couldn’t have shut down ... Collie ... by 2025 even if you wanted to, you couldn’t deliver renewable energy down that pathway and get it to Albany safely without droppage ... it would cost billions.

Hon Tjorn Sibma called the energy policy an absolute disaster. On every measure, they lack credibility.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (5)

Ms M. Beard	Dr D.J. Honey	Mr P.J. Rundle ( <i>Teller</i> )
Ms M.J. Davies	Ms L. Mettam	

Noes (45)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Mr M. Hughes	Mr S.A. Millman	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr G. Baker	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Dr K. Stratton
Ms L.L. Baker	Mr H.T. Jones	Ms L.A. Munday	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mrs L.M. O’Malley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.N. Carey	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr P. Papalia	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Ms A.E. Kent	Mr S.J. Price	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms C.M. Collins	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms D.G. D’Anna	Mr P. Lilburne	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr M. McGowan	Ms A. Sanderson	Ms C.M. Rowe ( <i>Teller</i> )
Ms K.E. Giddens	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mr D.A.E. Scaife	
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms J.J. Shaw	
Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms R.S. Stephens	

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Pair

Mr R.S. Love

Mr D.T. Punch

Question thus negatived.