

STORM DAMAGE

281. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I would like to first of all thank the minister for visiting my electorate of Morley last Friday to view firsthand the effect that the extreme weather had on my community.

Could the minister please provide the house with an update on the damage caused by Sunday's storm and the effect it has had more broadly across our state?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. Before I answer, on behalf of the member for South Perth, who has just whispered politely in my ear, I acknowledge the now departing year 8 students from Penrhos College.

It would be fair to say and obvious that in the last week this state has experienced some unusually violent weather conditions. Firstly, we had the tornado last week that impacted on the member for Morley's electorate: particularly areas of Dianella and adjacent areas in Morley. On Sunday afternoon we had a severe storm front cross the coast, which had extensive and widespread impacts right across the south west. The impact of this, as I said, has been many and varied. Clearly there has been some significant damage to property. We now have circumstances, as we visited last week in Morley, where a number of properties are uninhabitable. That is a huge impact on those people's houses. The member for Morley and I visited the house of a young couple. It was their first home that they had just finished renovating and was now completely uninhabitable. This is the human cost of what we are now working through. We have had significant property damage not just in Dianella and Morley but more broadly across the metropolitan area and through the south west.

Interestingly, the areas that were particularly impacted were around Cockburn, Rockingham, Mandurah and Bunbury and more broadly in the south west. The SES received over 700 requests for assistance during that time. There was also significant damage to electricity infrastructure. Western Power's advice is that the storm event on Sunday had the single biggest impact of any event in history on the south west integrated power network, easily eclipsing the impact of the March 2010 hailstorm incident. Why? It is because it was severe and widespread. Sixty power poles were blown over or snapped. Some 270-plus power lines were brought down. This has caused major challenges for Western Power. The Western Power callout line had over 200 000 calls and, at its peak, there were some 170 000 Western Power clients around the state without energy. I would just like to take the opportunity to acknowledge those Western Power employees and contractors who have worked so hard through day and night in very difficult circumstances to bring power back on. My advice is that there are still about 18 000 households without power across the state. A lot of those are in country areas like Donnybrook, Pinjarra and Boddington, but also areas like Kewdale, and other parts of the metropolitan area are still being impacted.

Interestingly, 13 hospitals were without power, as were a large number of traffic lights in particular across the metropolitan area. Power outages potentially affected supplies of water and potentially affected the capacity to gather and treat wastewater. That is on top of the impact on households.

I also acknowledge the efforts of the many thousands of volunteers across the state who have participated in the clean-up and in protecting communities and in making people safe. It is not only the 2 000 or so SES volunteers across the state. They have been supported by other emergency services volunteers from bushfire brigades and volunteer fire and rescue services. Career firefighters are now positioned across the south west to assist. People from the DEC and a whole range of government agencies have been activated to provide this response.

The challenge, of course, Mr Speaker, as you would be aware, is that tonight another significant storm front will cross the coast. I suspect it may already be impacting on the south coast. It is estimated to hit the city around 8 o'clock tonight. That has the potential to also cause significant damage. The advice I have is that it will be similar in magnitude to Sunday's storm with winds up to 125 kilometres an hour. The advice we must give to our communities is to do everything they can to stay safe. Unfortunately, today there was the death of a person who, as I have been advised, was attempting to assist a friend repair either a house, a part of a house or a shed. They have fallen through and tragically been killed. These types of events can have significant consequences.

We are urging people to be safe—to stay safe on the roads, to stay safe in their communities and, very importantly, to keep an eye on their neighbours. There are a lot of vulnerable people in our society. At times like this when there is no power, especially at night with a significant storm, it is important that everyone takes the opportunity to keep an eye on their neighbours. The volunteers and professional people who will be protecting our communities will be out there. We are well prepared for tonight's storm, but we all have an obligation to do what we can to keep our families, our homes, our communities and in particular vulnerable people in those communities safe.