

ELECTRICITY — OUTAGES — QUAIRADING

**203. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to the ongoing and persistent power failures in the wheatbelt town of Quairading, resulting in interruptions to business, damage to electrical equipment, loss of food and perishable items and at times an inability to contact emergency services.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that the installation of a community battery has been offered as a solution for this community?
- (2) What is the time frame for that solution to be delivered?
- (3) If this is not the solution, what is being considered by government and when will the community be advised?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:**

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for Central Wheatbelt. We have already had a discussion about this today because the member took a grievance to me, and I thought I responded in quite a fulsome way. But I am happy to discuss this issue. As I said before, there is a challenge across Western Australia when it comes to single-line, end-of-the-line communities where there is no network in existence in terms of the way we know the network exists in major towns and in suburbs of Perth. We have that challenge. Members all too often know about that. As the member pointed out, it is not just in Quairading but a wide range of communities that are at the end of the line.

Western Power has taken action on situations in those communities where there have been outages. I explained this to the member this morning and I will do it again. In the period since there have been outages, Western Power has invested more than \$1 million in strengthening the network that supplies Quairading in particular, including the replacement of over 50 poles, high-voltage insulators, crossarms and stays, and re-tensioning of six bays of conductors. There is no utility network on the planet that is completely invincible. All networks have weather issues, particularly in communities that have a single line and any break in that single line can result in outages further on. It is frustrating for people who lose power. I know that. It makes them grumpy. It is inconvenient. These days, we have modern conveniences. We rely on electricity to such an extent that when we lose it, it is an inconvenience.

At Quairading, there were 41 outages. This was reported in the newspaper as a large number. Yes, it is a large number. It is important to remember that only 14 of those lasted for more than an hour, so the great majority of them lasted for a period within an hour. It is also important to remember that 16 of them involved multiple customers. In other words, the majority of outages impacted one customer at a time. That explains why we have a high number of outages, but when only one person is impacted, that gives us a better context of what is going on. That is not to say in any way that that outage is not important to the person suffering from it, because it is. It is very inconvenient and we understand the concerns and the issues.

In terms of what we are doing about it, Western Power has responded in the way that I explained. We are always intent on maintaining our network in regional areas. It costs a lot more to maintain the systems in regional areas than it does in metropolitan areas. In further developing the resiliency of the network in regional areas, the Premier has asked me to investigate this in terms of climate change. With the scenario of climate change making extreme weather events more frequent, these issues are going to happen.

In January, we saw a supercell thunderstorm that knocked out transmission towers 50 metres high and reduced them to tinfoil. We have not seen these events in this state for 35 years. In fact, the last time that we saw anything like that was one transmission pole being bent near Merredin. This time in January, we saw five flattened. Climate change is having an impact and we need to be prepared for that. I am currently involved in an investigation through Energy Policy WA to see ways to make the system much more resilient across Western Australia.

As the member pointed out, batteries are part of the solution. No government is investing more in battery technology to bring resilience to the grid and system in Western Australia. Other states look with envy on Western Australia and how far we have progressed. I was in Collie the other day turning the sod on a big battery that is 500 megawatts and 2 000 megawatt hours. When it is completed, it will be the biggest in the country, and certainly one of the biggest in the world.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That will, member for Roe, assist the entire south west interconnected system network. In terms of battery technologies, we are rolling out standalone —

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** You asked the question! I am answering it.

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am answering the question.

In terms of other battery technology, there are the localised standalone power systems that we are also rolling out—both Horizon Power and Western Power—which are wonderful solutions to this issue. We have farmers down in Esperance who swear by it. They lived for years and years on the end of a very long line and now they have solar power backed by battery. They swear by it, and other farmers are putting up their hands to say “Can I have one of those too?” We will investigate a whole range —

**Mr R.S. Love:** They can’t keep the lights on.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** We are rolling it out, member.

This is a big change. This is a huge change not just in Western Australia, but for the entire world. This government is doing more and investing more to bring on this change and bring the advantages of renewable energy and battery technology.