

KALBARRI POWER SUPPLIES

Grievance

MR J.P.D. EDWARDS (Greenough) [9.42 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Energy. I remind the minister that this is the fourth time in two years that I have raised this issue. The other occasions were 18 March 2003, 20 March 2003, 18 September 2003 and 23 October 2003. I am talking about the issue of power supplies to Kalbarri, which is in my electorate, and other issues pertaining to power supplies. The minister will obviously have read the front page of today's *The West Australian* and the article relating to this matter. I note that the Office of Energy Safety has criticised Western Power for not being able to supply power to residents of that northern area. I do not think anything has been addressed by either the minister or Western Power since I last raised this issue. I am interested to hear his comments about whether he believes anything has been addressed. I need to enlarge on some of the problems and the effects they are having on the residents of Kalbarri and the general community. It is obviously not good enough to have three weekends in a row without power. Power has been cutting out at different times without any warning or advice. That affects airconditioners, televisions, cooking appliances and other essentials that people in Perth take for granted. People are at their wits' end. A residents' crisis meeting has been held. One of the most vocal complainants is a former Victorian ALP member of Parliament, Mr Jack Simpson. I have no doubt that he has rung the minister.

I am informed that blackouts have occurred over the past three weekends. On one occasion it was for three hours, for another it was five hours and, last weekend, it was for between 10 and 12 hours. As a result, food has gone rotten in domestic fridges and freezers. That does not take into account the commercial fishing industry, which has to run chillers and freezers for the fish catch. The other side of that is what happens when power is restored. If the owners of shops or retail outlets that use chillers or freezers are not on site when the compressors start up again, it is usual for them to start together, resulting in burnouts because of too heavy a power load going through the compressors. I am aware that one cafe owner had to pay \$1 100 for replacement and repairs. I am also aware of a local tourist operator who had to spend \$4 000 on repairing a computer damaged by a power surge. I am advised by local real estate agents that the problem is having a very negative effect on house and land sales in the Kalbarri region because people do not have confidence in the power supply to Kalbarri. Those are just some examples of problems that the Kalbarri community has to put up with. Quite honestly, in this day and age, it is not good enough, particularly for such a thriving and growing resort community as Kalbarri. It is a third-world service. People deserve better and they expect better. Kalbarri is a tourist destination with restaurants, caravan parks, holiday accommodation and resorts that bring in a fair amount of taxation revenue to the Government.

I will move quickly to another issue. Pole top burnouts occurred in the past week in the regions of Ajana, Binu and Ogilvie, all of which are in the shire of Northampton. I understand they were caused by damp weather. I am led to believe that Western Power usually coats the insulators with silicon every seven years. That was not the case last time; they were not given a silicon coating. That makes them more vulnerable to damp weather. However, I acknowledge the hard work and effort put in by the repair and maintenance crews of Western Power. They obviously do the very best they can with the conditions and resources they have. It is a pity their dedication is not matched by the minister and the powers that be in Western Power. I offer a suggestion to the minister for the problem in Kalbarri. A wind and diesel generator has been put in place in Bremer Bay to provide power for that community. Perhaps over the next few months that is something that could be assessed or given thought for inclusion in the upcoming budget for Kalbarri. It might be possible to run a generator from natural gas. Kalbarri is only 60 kilometres away from a gas source. The community is looking for a lead from the Government to achieve a better power supply. The community is fed up to the back teeth with what it has. This has been an ongoing problem for a very long time and people expect something to be done about it. I am most interested to hear the minister's comments on this. I hope I do not have to speak again in the next six months and repeat what I have said today.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont - Minister for Energy) [9.47 am]: I also appreciate the work done by Western Power crews. I have been advised by the member for Geraldton how well those crews work and their dedication in dealing with faults as they arise. Nothing that is said here should be taken in any way as criticism of the work done by Western Power's linesmen and other workers involved in fixing these problems.

I will provide some background about Kalbarri. Power is delivered to Kalbarri by a single feeder line from Northampton. It is at the extreme northern point of the south west interconnected system. There is no means of connecting the town site to other areas of the network, which would assist in restoring power supplies when there are impacts on the supply line from Northampton. I am advised that the reliability of the power supply for the Kalbarri region was relatively stable until about three weeks ago when a recurrent problem developed in the Kalbarri substation. Power was interrupted on two consecutive Saturdays during the late afternoon, affecting between 600 and 700 homes in the town site for between two and a half and three and a half hours. Some

customers experienced a total loss of power while others experienced partial power. The cause of the problems was not immediate, so monitoring equipment was installed to determine the cause. Following this, on Monday, 5 February, there was a recloser trip at approximately 6.00 am, followed by a loss of power to all customers north of Northampton at 7.15 am. Two pole-top fires on the feeder line between Northampton and Kalbarri caused these outages. I will not go on and detail what happened in the rest of the interconnected system. However, when power was restored at 12.05 pm, the inrush of current caused a recurrence of the problem at the substation and power failed again after six minutes. Supplies were completely restored at 3.30 pm. Clearly, the residents of Kalbarri have had a bad experience with the reliability of their power, particularly in the past three weeks. I sympathise with the residents of Kalbarri for what they have experienced as a result of the substation problem, the pole-top fires and the combination of the pole-top fires and substation issues that caused yet a further problem.

I have some good news for the residents of Kalbarri. Western Power has since identified the problem at the substation and has taken immediate action to ensure it does not recur. As a long-term solution, Western Power will install additional auto-reclosers with remote communication links. These pieces of equipment have been ordered and should be installed within two months. They will provide significant improvements to Western Power's ability to operate the network effectively and efficiently.

Overhead power lines in the Kalbarri town site were silicone coated last year to minimise the likelihood of pole-top fires, and this has been effective. The two pole-top fires on Monday, 5 April occurred outside the town on the feeder line north of Northampton. The silicone coating on sections of that line has reached the end of its useful life and the line will be recoated with silicone in the coming year. The problems in Kalbarri in the past few weeks are not related to the issues that affected the town last summer. The affected equipment that caused the problem last summer was silicone coated and has not been a problem since.

I make two points. First, Kalbarri residents have experienced a difficult period, and I sympathise with them. Secondly, Western Power has taken significant preventive action, which it advised me should result in an improvement to the reliability of Kalbarri power supplies. Thirdly, there is more risk to the reliability of the power supply in a town that is at the far extreme of the south west interconnected system and is served by a single feeder, because power cannot be switched into that town site from an alternative feeder. Kalbarri, therefore, has a problem. Ravensthorpe has a similar type of problem, as it is also at the end of a very long feeder.

Bremer Bay, which is also at the end of a long, single feeder, has experienced reliability problems. The solution at Bremer Bay has been to install diesel generators. In due course, there will be a wind turbine at Bremer Bay, which will be integrated with low-load diesel generators using unique Western Power technology. Western Power is also working on a technical solution for Bremer Bay, using a gate to allow Bremer Bay to maintain its connection with the grid. If the grid fails, the diesel and the wind power will come in. There have been problems in the past with diesel or wind-powered generation at the end of a long feeder line while maintaining connection with the grid. Western Power is working on a technical solution to that problem that will allow grid power to flow when convenient, and not otherwise. It is possible that such a solution, if it is successful at Bremer Bay, could be an option for other towns at the end of the grid. There would then be questions of investment priorities. Obviously we would not be able to immediately deal with all the towns that might put up their hands for the Bremer Bay solution, if that solution turns out to be technically effective. In making these remarks, I have no idea whether Bremer Bay and Kalbarri are strictly comparable. As a lay person, they appear to me to have some similarities. I can ask Western Power whether the Bremer Bay solution, if ultimately technically effective, could apply in principle to Kalbarri.

In the meantime I say this: there are too many pole-top fires, but the number is coming down. The power system is an ageing network and needs significant investment. However, Western Power has trebled the amount of money being spent on distribution maintenance. There is some good news for Kalbarri, but there is still a lot of work to be done.