

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Question On Notice

Tuesday, 5 April 2022

653. Hon Martin Aldridge to the Minister for Emergency Services

(1) I refer to the Western Australian Emergency Response Network (WAERN) repeater sites and evidence provided to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations 2021-22 Budget Estimates inquiry and I ask, in the past two years, has any WAERN repeater site failed?

(2) If yes to (1), will the Minister please provide the following in respect to each failure:

- (a) the date;
- (b) the time;
- (c) the length of failure; and
- (d) the location of repeater site?

(3) How does the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) determine the failure of a repeater site?

(4) Will the Minister please table the policy and procedures that apply in the event that a site loses power and switches to battery redundancy?

(5) How frequently is each radio repeater site inspected and maintained?

(6) How many radio technicians by FTE are ordinarily employed by DFES?

(7) How many radio technicians by FTE are currently employed by DFES?

(8) Noting the case study found at Appendix G of the *Independent Review of Christmas 2021 Power Outages*, I ask:

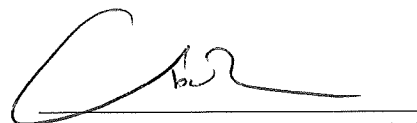
- (a) given the power disruption occurred at 1920 hours on 25 December 2021, why was it the case the repeater site mentioned was low on power by the following morning, given the Minister has stated each site has a 48-hour battery redundancy;
- (b) did the site mentioned in the case study lose power and fail;
- (c) at what date and time was back up generation mobilised to the site; and
- (d) at what date and time was back up generation operational at the site?

(9) Noting the comment on page 37 of the above mentioned review, which states, "The Western Power DFES TFB exemption does allow DFES to request re-instatement of power in an emergency however this appears to be rarely used and there are no documented procedures on how to apply that request", and I ask:

- (a) will the Minister please table the Western Power TFB exemption;
 - (b) on how many occasions has DFES 'requested' that power be restored pursuant to the exemption;
 - (c) of those identified in (b), on what dates were such requests made and in relation to which locations; and
 - (d) given the impact of extended outages on the WAERN repeater network as well as other telecommunication facilities which enable emergency response and emergency management, why does DFES not have a documented procedure in this respect?
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Answer

- (1) Yes
- (2) Currently DFES Radio Communications Service (RCS) repeater infrastructure does not have the required technology to provide ability to remotely monitor the health and performance of repeaters.
- (3) The failure of a repeater site is determined through the fault reporting system by the end user reporting the inability to communicate or a degradation of service.
- (4) The process for failover to battery is automated through the configuration of the sites power system design.
- (5) Annually.
- (6) 10
- (7) 6. Recruitment for the vacant positions is currently underway.
- (8) (a) DFES was not aware of it being low on power the morning of 26 December 2021.
 - (b) No
 - (c) On the morning of 26 December 2021.
 - (d) 0930hrs 26th December 2021.
- (9) (a) Please see tabled paper no. #
 - (b) Nil
 - (c) Nil
 - (d) Where the WAERN repeater network is impacted by the electricity network during an emergency DFES has procedures in place to address the outages, these procedures do not include requesting the re-instatement of power. DFES does not rely on the re-instatement of power to ensure WAERN network coverage



Hon Stephen Dawson MLC

**MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES;
INNOVATION AND ICT; MEDICAL RESEARCH; VOLUNTEERING**



BUSH FIRES ACT 1954
NOTICE OF EXEMPTION
TOTAL FIRE BAN
Section 22C

Lighting or use of fire, or carrying out activity in the open air that causes or is likely to cause fire, during a total fire ban

Correspondence No. 20/171182

Department of Fire and Emergency Services

Pursuant to the powers delegated and sub-delegated to the DFES Deputy Commissioner, I hereby exempt **Electricity Networks Corporation (T/A Western Power)** under section 22C of the *Bush Fires Act 1954*, from the operations of the provisions of sections 22B and 64 of that Act, subject to compliance with the conditions specified hereunder.

This exemption applies to **Western Power**, employees and its contractors for the conduct of planned and unplanned restoration works on the electrical network throughout Western Australia during a **declared total fire ban**.

Any planned and unplanned restoration works, including the activities listed below on a total fire ban day must be conducted in accordance with the "Specified Conditions" of this exemption notice.

- operating the transmission system to ensure security of electricity supply;
- carrying out Low and High Voltage disconnection and re-connection of customer supplies;
- operating the distribution systems overhead and ground mounted High Voltage and Low Voltage switchgear to energise (restoring power), isolating (turning off) the electrical network, commonly referred to as switching;

When the forecast fire danger rating issued by the Bureau of Meteorology is catastrophic for the place of work all planned restoration works on the electrical network must cease.

SPECIFIED CONDITIONS

1. Notification

- 1.1. A copy of this exemption notice must be accessible and readily available, if requested.
- 1.2. Notification is to be provided to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and the local government in which the work is being undertaken between 24 hours and 30 minutes prior to the works commencing, using the online notification form on the DFES website.
- 1.3. If the works are to be carried out within 3km of land managed by Parks and Wildlife Services, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) must be informed between 24 hours and 30 minutes, prior to the activity commencing.

- 1.4. Where possible the landowner on whose property the work is to be undertaken on, is to be advised prior to the activity occurring.
- 1.5. Any fire occurring at the work site, whether extinguished or not, must be reported to the DFES Communications Centre on 08 9395 9210, if the fire cannot be controlled or suppressed, it is to be reported immediately via 000.

2. Fire Prevention

- 2.1. **Western Power** management is to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment for all planned and unplanned works on a total fire ban day taking into account weather conditions and heed warnings and limit all activities to those which can be undertaken safely.
- 2.2. The risk assessment and applied fire prevention controls will be implemented and recorded.

3. Site Requirements: Off-road activity

- 3.1. If proceeding off-road for the purposes of locating a fault, undertaking a preliminary assessment of the safety or condition of the power transmission network and carrying out essential repairs, **Western Power** must comply with all conditions as prescribed and in accordance with *Bush Fires Regulations 1954*, specifically Off-road Activity (regulations 24ZH-24ZL).

4. Site Requirements: Hot Work activity

- 4.1. If the essential repairs require hot work as defined within the *Bush Fires Regulations 1954*, **Western Power** must comply with all conditions as prescribed and in accordance with *Bush Fires Regulations 1954*, specifically Hot Work Activity (regulations 24E-24J).

5. Site Requirements: Switching Operations of overhead powerlines (identified and unidentified faults)

- 5.1. All reasonable endeavours must be taken to identify the fault prior to switching. When a fault is identified, the operator is to ensure that any fire hazard arising from the fault is mitigated prior to re-energising.
- 5.2. Where switching of energised open air switchgear is to be conducted at sites within a 100 metre radius of combustible bush or grassland the following additional controls will apply:
 - 5.2.1. During onsite switching operations the ground within a 10 metre radius of the switchgear must be clear of flammable material and damped down with water; and
 - 5.2.2. At least one (1) approved fire extinguisher must be available on the ground at the point of switching.

An approved fire extinguisher means a fire extinguisher that:

- *is appropriately rated for the type of activity being carried out*
- *has a capacity of at least 9kg or 9L*
- *complies with all relevant Australian Standards*

- 5.3. Where a 10 metre clear radius cannot be achieved in 5.2, a mobile suppression unit, to be crewed by two (2) able-bodied and trained persons (can include the switching officer), comprising a minimum of 400 litres of water, with an operational pump and 20

metres of 19mm diameter hose (minimum), capable to delivering water through an adjustable nozzle is to be located in close proximity to the work site where the switching activity occurs. Alternatively undertake the switching at the next upstream enclosed switchgear.

5.3.1. personnel are to be trained in the operation of firefighting vehicles; and

5.3.2. the suppression and fighting of bush fire; and

5.3.3. the use of approved fire extinguishers

5.4. For unidentifiable faults, re-instatement of power is only to be undertaken on a falling Fire Danger Index (FDI) and not before the FDI falls below 32 (high rating 12-31)

5.5. In an emergency, DFES may request the re-instatement of power by the network operator

5.6. On completion of the energised switching operation, the person at the site of the area where the switching activity of open air switchgear is occurring shall monitor the site for at least 20 minutes for any signs of ignition and must not leave until they are satisfied there is no fire or anything likely to cause a fire on the site.

Period of Exemption

This exemption is **valid from the date of approval through until 30 June 2022 unless revoked.**



CRAIG WATERS

Deputy Commissioner, Operations of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, as sub-delegate of the Minister under sections 15 and 16 of the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998*.

 DECEMBER 2020