

MID WEST, BLACKOUTS AND POLE-TOP FIRES

195. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the minister representing the Minister for Energy:

- (1) Is the minister aware of the widespread blackouts and pole-top fires in the mid west region in the past 48 hours?
- (2) If so, what was the cause?
- (3) What compensation will be available for businesses and residents who have lost revenue and consumables as a result of blackouts during this period?
- (4) Will the minister now admit that the National Party is correct in its call for \$50 million a year for the next 10 years that would be needed to maintain and upgrade the network to meet statutory standards for electricity quality, reliability and metering accuracy -

Hon Tom Stephens: Why didn't you tell Barnett that when you were in government?

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE: The minister's Government is in charge. To continue -

- as outlined in the information for electricity consumers in Western Australia booklet published by the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection and the energy safety directorate?

- (5) If not, what is the minister's solution?

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Kim Chance: At \$9 million a year, the people know whose fault it is, too.

Hon Murray Criddle: They do.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: The minister is quite correct in waiting until all the other questions have been asked before proceeding.

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Pole-top fires were the main cause of fault activity in the past 48 hours. Pole-top fires can occur when a build up of dust and/or salt combines with moisture from light rain, forming a conductive paste. Current then flows across the insulators and can result in a smoulder or small fire. Washing insulators has proved ineffective unless repeated frequently as dust and salt resettle quickly in Perth's prevailing weather conditions.
- (3) Western Power can pay compensation for loss and damage only if it is caused by the corporation's negligence. It must be related to Western Power's incorrect action or the failure or inappropriate operation of Western Power's equipment. Western Power evaluates each claim on a case-by-case basis, making sure that all information is taken into account when making a decision.
- (4) Western Power will spend more than \$950 million on transmission and distribution improvements during the next four years. Western Power has more than doubled spending on regional power supply distribution - I repeat, doubled the spending on regional power supply distribution - and maintenance in the first three years of the Gallop Government.
- (5) Western Power has almost completed trials of a new method of applying silicone to energised overhead high-voltage powerlines. Assuming the trial is successful, Western Power will embark on a comprehensive program to minimise the likelihood of pole-top fires in this way.