

STATE BUDGET 2023–24 — WESTERN POWER CONNECTIONS

313. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the 2023–24 state budget and the minister's response to questions last week regarding delays in Western Power energy connections to new builds. I quote —

Western Power is ... actively recruiting specialists as part of the distribution design team to increase capacity and output.

Does the state budget include additional funding for Western Power to recruit specialists and other measures to fix this issue; and, if not, why not?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

The answer to the first question is no. I will explain why it is no. Western Power is not included in the budget. It has never been included in the budget. Western Power is a government trading enterprise. It is not funded by the budget. The interaction between Western Power and the budget is explained in the budget papers, if the member would care to read them: there are two interactions. The first is when a dividend is paid by Western Power to the general government sector, but, of course, we are currently not paying dividends from Western Power to the general government sector and we have not paid them for a number of years. The other one is when there are injections of capital into Western Power. We do that in respect of the taxation implications of gifted assets. The commonwealth government does not charge company taxes on GTEs. The GTEs pay tax equivalents to the state government. A significant part of Western Power's profit is from gifted assets from developers and others, therefore, it has to pay tax equivalents to the general government sector. Because it does not have a cash asset to pay this, because it is in gifted assets, which are capital items, we therefore—it has been done for a long time and was exactly the same under your government as it is under ours—pay a return to compensate it for the tax equivalents on the gifted assets. It is so fundamental to the operation of Parliament, but the member is not aware that —

Ms M.J. Davies: What are you doing, minister?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please! Opposition members, if you wanted to ask a different question, you should have asked it. As I understand it, the minister is answering the question he was asked.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, exactly. This is typical of what opposition members do. They ask a question because they do not understand even the fundamental issue. They did not know that at no time has Western Power's activities been included in the budget. They did not even know that. It was not included in the budget when it was in government. It was not included in the budget today because it is not authorised expenditure by Parliament. It is authorised under the Electricity Corporations Act. If the member does not understand that, how could she possibly ask the question she asked?

Other members interjected and asked what I am doing about that. It is a completely separate question. If they want to get up and ask that question, I will explain it to members. But do not ask me the wrong question, which demonstrates the member has not done even the first step in research. Again, I agree with the Minister for Transport, the member is a danger to Western Australia. She does not do any work. She does not understand the way Western Australia functions. She does not have any contacts in the business community and she does not understand what Parliament does. The member voted in favour of supply bills every time she has been here since the day she replaced Troy Buswell in Parliament. Did the member understand what she was doing when she voted for those supply bills because none of them, apart from the funding that I have already described, were about the funding for Western Power?