

WESTERN POWER — CONNECTIONS

**280. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to media reports that Western Australians with new residential housing builds are waiting between 12 and 15 months for Western Power energy connections, which is a significant increase from the usual time frame of 12 weeks. One builder with new homes that are ready to live in but have no power says that he is facing losses of over \$200 000, and another is facing bankruptcy as a result of the energy connection delays.

- (1) What does the minister say to those Western Australians facing financial stress thanks to the Western Power energy connection delays?
- (2) What is the minister going to do to fix the mess and speed up the process?
- (3) How is this contributing to addressing Western Australia's housing crisis?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

- (1)–(3) Firstly, I apologise to Western Australians who are caught up in this issue. The second question was about what is causing the problems. Western Australia's booming economy is causing the problems. The number of connections required to be processed by Western Power has gone up from 3 000 applications in 2020 and is now over 7 000. Unfortunately, we are in a successful economy and one of the strains on a successful economy is labour and also materials challenges. If we could find some additional engineers, that would be wonderful because that would allow us to execute the projects faster. Of course, unlike the previous government when it stopped training Western Australians for jobs, we have continued to train Western Australians for jobs. That has included a graduate engineering program so that we have a pipeline of Western Australian engineers available for work. That has been successful. Unfortunately, the number of connection applications in Western Australia has gone up by over 100 per cent, and we are having trouble finding both the materials and the people to do the work. Western Power has also gone to the UK and run a recruitment program and recruited out of the UK over 50 new workers for the business. Unfortunately, none of them are engineers. Many other trades and technical staff were recruited in that process.

Western Power is undertaking a number of steps to mitigate delays as a matter of priority, including outsourcing work and hiring new employees, working with industry on the current challenges and the potential improvements, and proactively engaging with customers to ensure effective delivery within current resources. To provide further support and assist land and property developers, Western Power is engaging earlier with developers to help prioritise their work based on their civil construction readiness; continually reviewing current processes in collaboration with developers to identify efficiencies; facilitating a working group with the Urban Development Institute of Australia and other industry representatives to provide a forum at which contentious issues can be discussed proactively; meeting with the UDIA and industry representatives to understand the concerns and provide a commitment to continue to take steps to improve performance; and working with designers to ensure a sole focus on land development parcels of work. Additionally, Western Power has reprioritised existing resources and is actively recruiting specialists as part of the distribution design team to increase capacity and output.