

WESTERN POWER — CONNECTIONS

103. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to reducing red tape to support the delivery of housing across the state.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government, through Western Power, is working to fast-track new electricity connections for new housing projects?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house what this means for Western Australians building a new home?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

I thank the member for Hillarys for that very important question.

- (1)–(2) When a state is firing along so well with a very strong economy, people wanting to live and migrate here, people being paid very good wages and employment being very high—all these success stories of our economy—it presents challenges in meeting the demand of that growth and change. Of course, the challenge for Western Power has been to keep pace with the demand for connections to all the new homes that are being built and to try to absorb the massive demand for its services.

I can report to the house the things that have been happening at Western Power. They are quite innovative and deliberative to have positive outcomes to reduce the time it takes to connect new homes to the system. I am pleased to inform the house that Western Power has done exactly that. This is a range of initiatives, and they include the doubling of its team of specialist engineers from 30 to 62, which is quite a dramatic increase in the staff of the specialist engineers who do that work. Also, it is increasing its stockholding of important infrastructure like transformers. We know that supply chain issues have arisen post-COVID, so getting larger orders in and having a stockpile of the important infrastructure it needs are good things that will save time. It is introducing early undertaking contracts to allow it to place orders sooner. It is getting those orders and beating the supply chain challenges that exist for all utilities right across the world.

Western Power is also investing \$10 million in a new customer portal that will improve how it communicates to customers about the connection process. Often, the issue with delays and being able to become more efficient in this process is about communication and getting information to the proponent or the person wanting to connect, to make sure that they are aware of what is required and what information is necessary.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr R.S. Love: Thank you for at least listening.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am glad the member for Moore is congratulating me, and I appreciate that.

Mr R.S. Love: Thank you for listening, finally.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: You are a grumpy man, aren't you?

He is one of the Muppets, isn't he? We can have wonderful news, but he still has a grumpy thing to say. Be magnanimous! If he wants to claim some responsibility, okay, he should go ahead, but be happy about it; be grateful. This is a government that listens and responds. He has got one face, hasn't he?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: He cracked a smile today.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is rare. Did we get that on the TV? It was a rare smile. His colleague next to him has mastered the art of the dopey grin, and that is why we love him, but it is good to see the member for Moore smiling, too.

Member for Hillarys, I went out to the control centre, or call centre, where the engineers and people involved in the connections are communicating with customers, and I got an idea of how things have changed recently. They were very much relieved that they are getting better news to customers because they have been under enormous pressure post-COVID because of the challenges that we have had with a very fast growing and successful economy, and supply chain issues. They told me directly that they are noticing that they are able to make more efficient processes, and that is good news for the customers. Those are just some of the initiatives.

I also want to mention a very important new initiative. It involves Western Power working with the Urban Development Institute of Australia's Western Australia division to help streamline early land clearance processes. We have done this, member for Moore. We have worked in the community, listening to everyone in the community. The UDIA has been central to this process in working with Western Power to come up with a way of making sure that land developers can access land titles earlier and accelerate project delivery.

I want to thank Western Power for its great work. I want to thank the employees who have been involved on the front line of delivering this improvement in services. I also want to thank the UDIA for its engagement and support in putting these initiatives together. It is important when a government is facing a challenge that is a part of its own success—we create problems because we have a booming economy and have challenges meeting demand—that we work with the community. We are getting the job done. I thank the member for the question.