

PUBLIC



Our ref:

28 October 2009

Hon. Max Trenorden MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Trenorden

Inquiry into Wooden Power Poles

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment for the above inquiry.

Cr Webster is away at present, but has asked me to pass on the following points in relation to issues with services provided by Western Power. The former Chief Bushfire Control Officer for the Shire of Broomehill-Tambellup has endorsed these concerns:

- **Ageing Infrastructure:** It is estimated the existing wooden pole network was installed in the 1960's. There does not appear to have been any significant regular maintenance program across the network in the 40+ years since that time, rather poles are inspected when a problem is reported, replaced when they fall over, or reinforced with metal stakes bolted to the base of the poles. In many cases the poles have rotted at ground level and are only supported by the metal stakes.
- **Maintenance:** Owners of farming properties in the shire have reported sporadic visits by contractors engaged by Western Power to undertake pole checks. Unsafe poles are noted by the contractors, and Western Power staff then carryout a follow-up assessment. In many cases the condemned poles are deemed safe by Western Power staff, and are not replaced. This raises the question: Are the contractors being trained appropriately to carry out the pole inspections, and if so, why are their recommendations not being accepted and implemented by Western Power?
- **Pole-top fires:** Numerous fires have occurred in paddocks across the shire, which have been attributed to power poles. Many of these fires have been at the site of single-phase poles, which are not capped off; instead the top of the pole has been cut to a point. Over the years the tops of these poles have deteriorated and dust and debris has accumulated making an ideal environment for sparks to take hold. Capping poles with an insulated material may assist to reduce the number of fire incidents starting in this manner.

This is also a problem in main line poles with wooden cross arms, where the cross arm timbers are rotting and again, providing a fuel source for sparks to take hold.

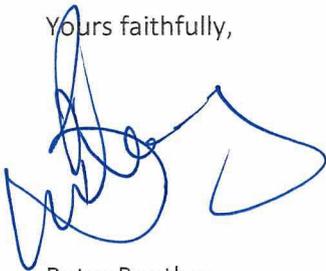
These fires have created a significant workload for our volunteer brigade members, who are restricted to extinguishing fires around the base of the poles, while the pole itself may still be burning. Brigade members are instructed not to take any action on the pole itself, but are required to wait until a Western Power crew can attend the scene. During a prolonged period of inclement weather, resources are already stretched, and the delay from initial call to attendance at the scene can be lengthy, with possible devastating consequences.

The incidence of live powerlines falling to the ground is highly likely, creating another hazard for volunteers, and it is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured.

Pole top fires not only affect the owner of the property on which the pole is located. Any neighbouring property on the same power line is also left without power for as long as it takes for Western Power to carry out repairs. In the majority of cases this work is carried out within hours of the incident, but in some cases residents are without power for days at a time. One can only assume this would not be accepted in a more populated area such as suburban Perth.

I trust this feedback will be of benefit to the Standing Committee in their considerations. If you require further information please contact me on 98253555.

Yours faithfully,



Peter Bentley
**Manager Administration &
Customer Service.**