



Shane Love MLA Member for Moore

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Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Committee Members

### **Petition No 45 – Regional Electricity Network**

I write as the Principal Petitioner of the first electronic petition with an additional paper petition containing 47 signatures, in support of an investigation into the regional electricity network, as requested by the petitioners.

Unreliable power, including lengthy delays, power surges and brown outs, have been an ongoing problem in regional areas for many years. The vulnerability of the Midwest and Goldfields in particular have been exposed, but the issues are by no means confined to these areas.

Last summer had been “one of the worst ever” for power delivery in the Mid West, with thousands of households and businesses losing power multiple times since December, impacting the health of residents, costing small businesses thousands of dollars, harming local tourism opportunities and leaving residents frustrated and upset.

The last summer’s performance was the catalyst to the launch of the petition , but it really is not an outlier with issues in communities well documented over the years and detailed in a Grievance I took to then Minister for Energy, Dr Nahan in 2014 regarding the supply into Kalbarri [A39+S1+20140403+p2089b-2092a.pdf \(parliament.wa.gov.au\)](#) and to current Energy Minister Bill Johnston in 2020 [A40+S1+20200910+p5707a-5709a.pdf \(parliament.wa.gov.au\)](#)

The recent “*Independent Review of Christmas 2021 Power Outages - Final Report*” examined some of the issues of concern but was confined to the Western Power network only and did not address any issues in the more remote areas of the state reliant on Horizon Energy.

The petition requests the following four issues be considered by a full and independent inquiry:

#### **1. Preparedness for and response to power outages**

Communities in many regional areas suffer from power outages that are frequent and often the result of normal climatic cycles, for instance dust and salt accumulation on lines and insulators combining with damp conditions, a heavy dew or light rain, leading to arcing of power through the salt and dust into the wood post causing it to come alight. Western Power appears to have no solution to this problem that has been occurring for decades. The response to these outages appears to be less immediate than in the past, leading to lengthy periods of time without power. Some communities record multiple outages every summer, including frequent short interruption that cause damage and interruption to machinery and appliances.

#### **2. The appropriateness of the extended outage payment;**

Western Power have provided an \$80 payment for extended outages. During the Christmas blackouts this was extended to \$160. It has now been set at \$120 ongoing but with no rationale advanced as to how this figure is calculated. Consideration could be given for the payment to be examined, noting regional residents shop



infrequently and stand to lose more perishable goods in a power outage. Residents and businesses regularly suffer losses of hundreds if not thousands of dollars' worth of food with no ability to claim these costs back.

### **3. Review policies and procedures for mitigating fire risk**

Lengthy outages have been occurring since about 2013 when Western Power procedures on days of high fire danger appear to have changed. Changes to these practices are noted in the Independent Review of Christmas 2021 Power Outages along with some recommendations. Whilst I welcome the recommendations, I still believe there are questions to be asked and answered. Questions around the capacity of the network itself to be more resistant to adverse weather needs further consideration. On the other hand, I understand there are numerous examples of Western Power equipment starting fires.

### **4. To make recommendations to improve resilience and performance of the network**

Regional communities in the SWIS area have a power system that was designed in the era of one large centre of power generation at Collie with massive distances of poles and wire criss-crossing the countryside. This appears to leave areas such as the Goldfields and Midwest with a power system much more susceptible to risk from climate and equipment failures. What lessons can be learnt from the massive disruptions of Cyclone Seroja and the terrible power reliability issues of the last summer?

For some regional communities a lack of power leaves them vulnerable and disadvantaged with telecommunications and water supplies also impacted. Indeed, many residents question if it is worth continuing to live in towns where they can expect days, if not weeks, without power at the hottest time of the year. Often the loss of power leads to loss of communications as mobile tower battery backup lasts but a short while. The old copper Telstra network appeared to be much more able to withstand power disruptions. Many landlines now reliant on the NBN will also lose connection in the event of power disruption.

Limitations associated with the installation of solar power for regional consumers need to be investigated. Flexibility that would allow wider installation and use of solar power would contribute to network resilience.

The matters above were outside the scope of the *Independent Review of Christmas 2021 Power Outages*, and need deep examination. It is not simply about power. It is about liveability in the regions, it is about regional development, it is about health. At present, medical services are unable to provide air-conditioning for patients, vaccines are discarded as they can not be kept refrigerated for extended periods, elderly residents are forced to swelter in heatwave conditions and shops are unable to trade leaving residents without food if they cannot travel to distant centres. In addition, extended power outages severely damage the reputation of tourist towns, forcing businesses to shut down and resulting in job losses.

Thank you for the opportunity to examine the issues raised in the petition.

Yours sincerely

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