

HARDSHIP UTILITY GRANT SCHEME

448. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the minister representing the Minister for Energy:

- (1) Is the minister aware that due to the government's fixed price increases on utilities, the average household power bill in Western Australia will increase by \$440 this financial year?
- (2) Is the minister aware that nearly 18 500 households had their power cut off last financial year due to unpaid power bills, a 96 per cent increase from the previous financial year?
- (3) Is the minister aware that the number of families and households approved for payments by the hardship utility grant scheme has also increased 78 per cent over the last two years?
- (4) How much extra revenue does the government estimate will be generated from these increases in fees and charges to household power bills?
- (5) Given the substantial increase in HUGS applications in the past two years, has additional funding been allocated to the HUGS scheme above the \$15.8 million allocated last year —
 - (a) if so, how much; and,
 - (b) if not, why not; and does the government seriously believe these further increases to household finances will not lead to further assistance being requested from those in need?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The following information has been provided by the Minister for Energy.

- (1) The fixed charge for electricity supply will increase by \$169 this financial year, with no increases to the variable charge for households.
- (2)–(3) The government is aware that a number of households in Western Australia are experiencing financial difficulty as the state transitions away from the mining investment boom. This is why the state government offers a range of social concessions to households. In particular, the McGowan Labor government has already overhauled the hardship utility grant scheme after it was underfunded by the former Liberal–National government. The McGowan government will add an extra \$16.3 million into the program over two years, including \$5.1 million in 2016–17 and \$11.2 million in 2017–18. This will meet both an increase in demand for the program and increase the annual HUGS grant limit from \$538 to \$581 and \$891 to \$962 for those living above the twenty-sixth parallel. The financial counselling program, which was scrapped by the former Liberal–National government, will also be reinstated with \$5.6 million allocated to the program across the forward estimates period. This is in addition to the government's election commitment to provide additional financial counselling services for victims of domestic violence.
- (4) The increase in the fixed charge for electricity supply will generate an additional \$57 million this financial year compared with the previously assumed seven per cent increase reflected in the 2016–17 *Pre-election Financial Projections Statement*.
- (5)
 - (a) Yes. Twenty million dollars has been provided to the hardship utility grant scheme in 2017–18, which was critically underfunded by the former government.
 - (b) Not applicable.