

COMMUNICATION NETWORKS — STORM DAMAGE — MARGARET RIVER

398. Mr D.T. REDMAN to the Minister for Emergency Services:

I refer to last week's storms that smashed the west coast and left Margaret River and Walpole communities without power.

- (1) Is the minister aware that this outage led to the mobile phone networks of both communities going down, severely impacting emergency service response?
- (2) Is the minister also aware that Margaret River Senior High School could not directly contact parents to pick up their children when the school's water services shut down due to the power failure?
- (3) What plans does the minister have to build resilience into the communication networks of such communities?

Mr F.M. LOGAN replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(3) The storms were quite invasive in Western Australia, washing away foreshores, as we saw in the midwest and in Fremantle, and there was a whole series of other damage with roofs ripped off and powerlines brought down. Mobile phone towers being affected as a result of the power being temporarily disconnected in Margaret River does happen. Margaret River would not be the only place where that would have occurred. Of course, I am unaware of the impact on Margaret River Senior High School. It is up to the local member to raise that issue with the appropriate minister and how the school notifies parents when these things occur.

Last Friday, we had what we call a MCPEM, a Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management meeting for police and emergency services ministers, and the very issue of building resilience was raised. I am pleased to see that the federal government will provide \$31.5 million for addressing the issue of resilience, particularly for mobile phone towers. I raised the issue with the federal minister, Hon David Littleproud, that both the member and certainly members of the Nationals WA have raised with me about the impact on mobile phone towers as a result of bushfires and other outages, particularly when it comes to batteries and battery backup. As I have raised personally on a number of occasions with Telstra, its failure to do proper maintenance on those towers and replace those batteries when they diminish in power may be an issue. I am unaware why that mobile phone tower went out, but I will certainly raise that with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, or with Telstra—I presume it is a Telstra tower, but it could be Optus. The good news is that funding from the appropriate body, the federal government, which is responsible for telecommunication, will eventually be forwarded to Western Australia for building resilience in mobile phone towers.