

HARDSHIP UTILITY GRANT SCHEME — REGIONAL AREAS

432. Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE to the Leader of the House representing the Premier:

I refer to an ABC regional report today that the hardship utility grant scheme applications have more than doubled and pensioners are being unable to heat their houses in some regional locations.

- (1) Given that electricity prices rose by 11 per cent and water prices by six per cent this year, by how much will this government increase the hardship utility grant?
- (2) When will the government concede that the failure to find a new revenue source is punishing the most vulnerable in our community?
- (3) Will it now commence negotiations with BHP and Rio Tinto to increase the special lease rental amount paid to the state government?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) As was released in the media statement on 22 June, the McGowan Labor government has boosted funding for the hardship utility grant scheme by \$5.1 million in 2016–17 and \$11.2 million in 2017–18. This will allow us to increase the annual HUGS grant limit from \$538 to \$581 and from \$891 to \$962 for those in the regions, living above the twenty-sixth parallel.

Furthermore, also contained in that media statement, but repeated here for the benefit of the honourable member, the government is increasing the energy assistance payment to \$300 in 2017–18, which is an increase of 28 per cent from 2016–17.

- (2)–(3) The government takes no pleasure in the financial measures it has taken to begin to fix the financial disaster left to it by the former Liberal–National government. It will be looking to all sectors of the community to contribute towards the financial repair of the state’s needs. As referred to in the answer to (1), the state has taken steps to ameliorate the impact of changes to fees and charges on the most vulnerable in our community. The member’s question is disingenuous regarding the special lease rental fee. As was acknowledged by his former leader, Brendon Grylls, any revenue generated by ripping up state agreement acts would be redistributed away by the Commonwealth Grants Commission to other states and territories. This would put the state back at square one after three years, regardless of the inevitable legal action and possible financial consequence that would follow.