

WESTERN POWER — STREETLIGHTING — FOREST LAKES

Grievance

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.23 am]: I grieve to the Minister for Energy on an important matter of community safety, and that is the provision and maintenance of adequate streetlighting. The Forest Lakes area of the Thornlie electorate has had an ongoing problem since 24 February this year, when complaints were initially made about failed streetlighting. Clearly, we have a legacy problem; inadequate maintenance has got us into this situation in which streetlighting is failing us. This particular case has become a real saga. On 24 February, the initial complaints were lodged. Some four and a half months went by until lights came back on on 13 July, and now I am sorry to report that during my visit last night, the lights were out again. To be very precise about it, I took the liberty of logging the actual streets involved on the website Strava, my preferred social media website, and over a 900-metre stretch, seven lights were out, just in that little sample area that I investigated last night. After a four-and-a-half-month period of no lighting, we have gone back to having no lighting after a month of having some level of lighting. Clearly, this is a real problem for residents. They are finding that their preparedness to go to community functions in the evening is hampered because they do not feel as safe without the streetlighting. It was very dark last night. Indeed, I took a photo, and that is on the Strava site. The Minister for Energy's operatives are welcome to go to my page and see the area involved—Lakesend Road and Forest Lakes Drive—and get a good sense of the scale of the problem.

As well as this legacy of poor maintenance by the Barnett Liberal–National government, we also have a legacy of a complaints procedure that is not really as it should be. I encourage the Minister for Energy to ask that his Western Power operatives put themselves in the shoes of those people who are making complaints. I have a fairly detailed explanation from the person at Western Power who is responsible for these complaints—namely, complaints and resolutions officer Duncan Roylance—who explained how it works. I am sure that for the organisation it is perhaps a system of issuing a reference number after there has been a certain validation process and some checking. It is a convoluted process, though, for the residents. It is not satisfactory at all because the residents will want to go to the website, and they are quite prepared to use the website to log their complaints, but they do not want to wait for Western Power to do all the necessary checking until they can get a reference number. There is a delayed process that prevents people getting a reference number so that they know their complaint has been lodged. The delay there is quite unsatisfactory. We need to speed that up. The website itself has the makings of being something that is really useful. We can actually see every street lamp on the complaints website, but it should be live; there should be some indication that there has been a complaint lodged against a particular site and then the community could be involved in the monitoring of things.

I wrote to the minister about this issue on 6 June, so I suppose that helped spur things along to bring about the lights coming back on in mid-July. But, as I said, things have gone downhill again, so, clearly, we have a significant problem that is not just about light bulbs going out; it is also about some cabling problems. I wonder whether the time has come to look at new technologies and LED solar-powered lights instead—or some alternative that is not connected or bound by whatever is hampering the connection at the moment. I realise the predicament that the minister is in with this problem that he has inherited. It reflects badly on the attitude of the previous government towards maintaining streetlighting. It also reflects badly on the attitude of previous ministers when it comes to fostering a good customer feedback approach to complaints. That is something that really needs to be dealt with because, inevitably, lights go out. We all accept that, but members of the community have every right to expect that when they lodge a complaint, they get a sincere listening to and their complaint is handled with efficiency; it is responded to immediately with no delays. Even if the actual fixing of the problem might be delayed, they can at least know very quickly what is going on and have a satisfactory explanation. I hope that the problem with the 900-metre stretch that I saw last night can be resolved very soon and alternatives put in place. I have heard stories about some lights that were reconnected being on during the day and going off in the evening. It is clearly a challenging situation. I am very surprised about this. I have seen Western Power linesmen doing all sorts of amazing work, so it is very disappointing to hear about this poor maintenance and inability to repair some of the problems that we face when it comes to streetlighting. It is an area in which the community has every right to expect the highest quality of service. I hope that as we take the reins and reorganise the systems, and community members can enjoy a much improved quality of service for streetlighting.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Minister for Energy) [9.30 am]: I thank the member for Thornlie for his grievance. I am disappointed to hear that as recently as last night the member for Thornlie, out on his bike inspecting streetlights in his electorate, noticed that some streetlights were not working, but this is something, as the member for Thornlie pointed out, that has been an ongoing issue. The member for Thornlie is quite correct: ultimately, this is a community safety issue and, as a result, if people do not feel that they can walk the streets at night because of darkness, that is something that needs to be resolved very quickly. I am disappointed to hear that after what appeared to be an initial resolution that the lights are again out. This is something that we need to rectify

immediately. I also want to make some comments about the complaints procedure, which is clearly leaving people somewhat uncertain about whether their complaint has actually been heard and is in the process of being actioned.

Just quickly by way of background, the member for Thornlie is quite correct in that Western Power needs to be a very client or customer-focused organisation. As a result, it sets time frames to respond to the rectification of its service standards, which depend on the cause of the streetlight fault. For example, when an individual light fails, and we are all familiar with that happening on streets in our electorate, Western Power has a requirement to fix that light within five business days if it is within the Perth metropolitan area. Importantly, the Economic Regulation Authority assesses Western Power's performance on that five-day fixing requirement for those lights. The most recent performance report on metropolitan Perth stated that 99.5 per cent of jobs had achieved that target. However, to be frank, they are actually the easier issues to resolve. The ERA report noted that the number of faulty lights in Western Power's distribution system has been trending downwards, reaching a six-year low in 2015–16. However, I point out that that six-year low was still over 28 000 faults. This figure relates to the individual lights that we are all familiar with, but, obviously, the member for Thornlie has a particular issue because he refers to a 900-metre stretch of lights that are not working and, from the sounds of it, are plunging an entire street into darkness.

The other matter that has been an issue for the member for Thornlie is when there is an underground cable fault. This requires a longer repair period and Western Power has a target of eight weeks to repair those kinds of faults. Obviously, eight weeks is a long period, but because of the nature of the work required to fix that sort of infrastructure, it takes a lot longer. The member for Thornlie pointed out that this has now been going on for some four and a half months, which is considerably longer than eight weeks. As the member pointed out, there has been a concentrated number of cable faults in Thornlie, particularly around Forest Lakes, because, unfortunately, the streetlight cables in Thornlie are over 30 years old and reaching the end of their useful life, which means that the maintenance requirements are going up. Since November 2016, Western Power has repaired 112 lights, replaced 1 331 metres of underground cable and upgraded four pillars in Thornlie generally. It has also made some repairs in the area that the member for Thornlie has brought up today, but, clearly, it has not been a permanent fix in light of what the member for Thornlie saw last night.

I will now move on to the complaints process. As a result of not just the member for Thornlie's complaint, but also other members who have made complaints to Western Power to have issues fixed over time, a new website was introduced by Western Power in October last year. It allows the public to report individual lights effectively by clicking on them, as the member for Thornlie pointed out, thereby enabling a person to see the lights online, which increases the accuracy of pinpointing which lights are causing problems and for Western Power to respond. When a complaint is made through that website—this is something that I will pursue today; thank you, member for Thornlie—there is a delay in getting a reference number, which means that members of the public, whilst they may have lodged a complaint, are uncertain whether it has been acknowledged at Western Power's end and therefore action is being taken to rectify that problem. I will chase that up today to see whether we can do something to ensure that members of the public are at least given some satisfaction that they have been heard.

The member for Thornlie, as he pointed out, wrote to me back in June and that generated some activity for Western Power, but it looks as though the issue involves more than just individual lights and there could be a cable problem. I will seek some advice from Western Power about that in light of the advice that the member has given me today about the lights going out again last night. Ultimately, when we have a 900-metre stretch or longer—basically an entire road—of lights that have gone out, it becomes an issue of not just community safety but also opportunistic crime when cars are parked in darkness or houses along the street are in darkness, which is something that we need to rectify. I certainly thank the member for Thornlie for that grievance and undertake to come back on both of those issues: the complaints website and the 900-metre length of streetlights that I thought Western Power had fixed, but clearly there is an underlying or further problem resulting in those lights going out.