

COAL-FIRED POWER STATIONS — PREMIER COAL

**583. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Energy:**

I have a supplementary question. The minister may not be able to direct Premier Coal, but he does have the capacity to direct Synergy to resolve problems earlier. Why has the minister not done that?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

This is the bizarre issue that the member does not seem to understand: when did it become clear that Premier Coal was not going to be able to deliver the contracted tonnage? It was when it shut the pit in August, and we did take action immediately. One of the actions that we took was to engage with the Australian Energy Market Operator about getting approval to not use the Collie coal-fired power station from September to December. This is bizarre! This is a stupid idea that somehow we are either not dealing with the issue expeditiously or being transparent. Neither of those allegations can be justified by the behaviour of the government.

Again, on 12 August this year, I sat at the national energy ministers' meeting when the Australian Energy Market Operator said that it did not believe there would be any challenges to capacity over summer in Western Australia. Exactly three weeks later, its representatives were in my office telling me that they had changed their position. Paul Murray said in his article that Synergy operates the south west interconnected system; it is just not correct. Synergy is a generator in the SWIS. Most of the electricity produced in the south west interconnected system is not provided by Synergy; it is provided by the private sector. Western Power operates the transmission system, but the actual market is operated by AEMO, not by the government of Western Australia. Why is it operated by AEMO? It is because the Liberal Party asked AEMO to take over from the Independent Market Operator. Therefore, it was members opposite who put it in charge of the south west interconnected system. I understand that this is a complex and difficult issue to deal with, but that is why I am up-front and dealing with it.

Another part of the member's criticism said these events —

... have demonstrated the risks of the premature elimination of coal-fired generators while increasing renewable energy.

I will remind the member that the former government wanted to shut all the coal-fired power stations five years before us. The former government's proposal was to have them all closed.

Several members interjected.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Do not look around; you were the shadow Minister for Energy!

Tomorrow we will have a debate about energy policy, and I will come in here with the transcript of the press conference when the member said it was a good idea. I will also remind the member that he and I were both at a conference, after the election, where he put up all the slides and went on in detail about how good the policy is. I know he has changed his mind and now he is rewriting history that it was somebody else's idea. The member told me that he had invented the idea in June or July 2020. Therefore, the member cannot walk away from his thumbprints all over the idea to close every coal-fired power station in Western Australia not by 2030, but by 2025.