

GAS SUPPLY — ESPERANCE

41. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the impending 31 March deadline for Esperance households to transition off the redundant reticulated gas network in Esperance. Given 35 per cent of households and 85 per cent of businesses are yet to transition off the previous gas network in Esperance, will the government extend the gas contract until all households and businesses are fully connected?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

Thanks for the question, member. I invited you to have a discussion yesterday, because I wanted to give you a detailed briefing, but you did not come back and talk to me, so, unfortunately, you were not able to get the briefing I offered to you yesterday. But I am sure we can arrange one for you.

Mr P.J. Rundle: It was late this morning, minister.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I just want to make it clear that I am not criticising you for not taking the briefing; I am just making sure that everybody is aware that I had offered you a briefing on this issue.

I remind people about what happened here. The government of Western Australia has never provided natural gas to any residential customer anywhere in Western Australia since the sale of Alinta by the National Party back in the 1990s. When it was privatised, we stopped supplying natural gas. There has been no natural gas supplied to any customer in Esperance by the government of Western Australia. However, a private company that was doing that work decided to shut that down and gave us no proper notice. We negotiated with that company, and gave it a very large amount of money to keep the gas network going until 31 March. At the same time, we allocated resources to Horizon Power to work with those customers to transition away from gas to electricity. A small number of customers chose not to electrify their house, and they have gone on to other arrangements, because that is their choice. A small number of residential customers have specific requests for a type of equipment that is not yet available who understand that from 31 March they will have to make their own arrangements until that equipment is available. For example, they will cook on a barbecue until the specific electric equipment that they have asked for is available. That is a supply chain issue beyond the control of Horizon. It is only because those particular customers have specific requests that Horizon is accommodating them.

All residential customers have been accommodated. Of course, some work is still being completed, but it is February. I want to congratulate the local Esperance contractors who have been doing the work of uninstalling the gas and installing the electric equipment, and the local Esperance suppliers that have been selling the new equipment to Horizon Power. We made sure that Horizon used local contractors and local equipment suppliers. I understand that a couple of suppliers and installers have had to come from elsewhere for specific very specialised equipment that some individual residents have chosen.

With respect to business customers, all business customers except for two have arrangements in place. Two specific businesses do not—Horizon Power has made a number of approaches over the last 12 months to those two businesses. Indeed, the chief executive officer of Horizon Power has personally reached out to those two businesses to assist them to make a decision on what they will do.

So far as I am advised, and why I was so keen to give the member a detailed briefing on this issue, we are very pleased with the way this has gone. I know a particular journalist with the ABC down there has been promoting stories about trouble, but actually Horizon Power has done an exemplary job in keeping in touch with the individual consumers who have been impacted by this and a great job keeping in touch with the installers—the local Esperance-based contractors—and the local government. Unless the member can tell me about a specific issue that I am not advised of, I am not quite sure whether he was asking me a Dorothy Dixier or driving at some negative outcome.