

CYCLONE SEROJA — WESTERN POWER — RECONNECTIONS

201. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the devastating impact of tropical cyclone Seroja on towns across the midwest, including my community of Geraldton, in particular the impact it had on the electricity network. Can the minister update the house on the assistance the state government is providing to these regional communities, and outline how this will deliver greater resilience for these communities in the face of an increasing number of extreme weather events?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I am pleased to answer that question from a strong advocate for her community.

Cyclone Seroja took out electricity infrastructure in an area of the state that is 700 kilometres long and 150 kilometres wide. That is an area equivalent to the size of Tasmania. So far, 3 396 poles have had to be replaced. To put it in context, that is compared with the 10 800 poles that would normally be replaced across the entire network each year. In other words, in the last six weeks, Western Power and its workforce have replaced over 30 per cent of the annual work for the entire network in just one part of the state. That includes work equivalent to six months that would normally be done to the transmission—that is, the high voltage system. One hundred and seventy poles and 150 insulators were replaced in six weeks, which, as I say, would be the equivalent of the ordinary work on the high-voltage transmission system done in six months.

I thank the member for Geraldton and Hon Sandra Carr, member for the Agricultural Region, for their strong advocacy on behalf of their constituents. I announce today that the government recognises that even though 99 per cent of Western Power customers have been reconnected, those 281 customers who were not reconnected by 24 May 2021 will be eligible for a \$1 000 grant to assist with the cost of diesel fuel to keep their generators going. Those customers will be able to apply from today through the Western Power website for this grant. Western Power will send to all local members a link to the application form so that all members such as the hardworking member for Geraldton can link their constituents to this additional benefit. We understand the incredible disruption that this enormous storm caused to the people of the midwest.

I want to let people know that Western Power is using this as an opportunity to improve the quality of the infrastructure. The infrastructure was fit for purpose and strong, but it was not able to withstand this once-in-a-century storm. Sadly, with climate change, we expect these storms to be more common. Things that Western Power is doing are using better configurations of the infrastructure so that it can be more resilient in future, improving the quality of the insulators and applying more modern technologies to ensure the highest resilience. Thirty-five customers in the area will get Western Australian-manufactured standalone power systems. This is an important contribution to improving the quality of service for people in that area. Six customers already had had Western Australian-made standalone power systems installed for them and none of those customers lost their energy supply during the storm. Those 35 customers will also be able to enjoy the same benefit as the others do. I am excited to tell everyone that the McGowan government is committing to 1 000 additional standalone power systems, mostly for Western Power customers but also for Horizon Power customers, that were manufactured here in Western Australia using our unique skills that allow us to be the global leader in this technology to further support the electricity supply across regional Western Australia.