

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY — MIDWEST

196. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the more than 24 000 residents of the midwest who awoke to six hours without power on Tuesday, 14 March, and again for seven hours on the following Friday and the failing of backup systems in towns such as Dongara.

- (1) Does the minister now concede that his blackout review has failed to improve the power supplies to these communities?
- (2) Will the minister conduct a review of this blackout to ensure such a preventable event does not occur again?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

- (1)–(2) I am pleased to answer these questions. I begin by apologising to all the residents impacted by these two outages. It is clearly not acceptable and very difficult when the power is out. Therefore, I apologise for that, but it is also important to understand why it occurred. On 14 March, Western Power was conducting planned improvements to the transmission system, and therefore islanded the area north of Three Springs so that it was not connected to the larger grid at the time. It was being operated from the Mungarra power station. The electricity being used north of Three Springs was not coming, as normal, from the south west of the state but rather from the Mungarra power station. This is why the member for Cottesloe was so wrong the other day when he said that there was a problem getting the power station to start; in fact, the station was running. Unfortunately, a privately owned wind farm had a fault. That fault had nothing to do with the operations of Western Power, nor did it have anything to do with the operations of Synergy. Unfortunately, that fault caused the Mungarra power station to trip off. The system had been isolated because of the need to do the improvement works to make the system more reliable. The backup generator was in use but unfortunately this privately owned power station caused a problem that led to the backup power station ceasing to operate. That is how we could not reconnect the backup power station—because it was already in use. I know that this is of no benefit to the community because they still suffered from that outage but I think it is important for people to understand that it did not relate to anything under the control of either Western Power or Synergy.

On 17 March, Western Power went back to do the works to improve the reliability of the system north of Three Springs. Unfortunately, a separate problem occurred. What happened was, even though the privately owned wind farm was not connected to the broader grid and therefore should not have been called into action, the Australian Energy Market Operator sent an instruction to Walkaway wind farm to restart. Unfortunately, because electricity must be in balance all the time and because the system at that time again was being supplied by the Mungarra power station, when Walkaway power station restarted under the instructions of the Australian Energy Market Operator, it meant there was an overpower situation. As a security measure, as it is supposed to do, the system shutdown. The reason it is supposed to do that is it is very dangerous and there can be electrocutions and other problems if an oversupply of electricity into the system is allowed. Again, it is one of these unfortunate situations, not because of anything Western Power did and not because of anything Synergy did but because of other people, there was a problem in the system.

Of course, if you are without power, none of this makes a difference, but the point I make to the community is very important. The government is investing millions of dollars to assist people in this area. We are spending over \$5 000 on average for each of the connections north of Eneabba because we know we can do better and that is what we are doing.