

WESTERN POWER — POWER POLE DEFECT NOTICES

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

I refer to the Seven news report last night that thousands of residential households will be forced to pay to replace power poles on their property under threat of having their power shut off, as well as findings in the Parkerville court case that Western Power is obligated to either repair or ask consumers to repair private power poles on their property.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that Western Power could choose to cover the cost of replacing these poles?
- (2) Does the minister agree with Western Power's decision to force Western Australians to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket, despite the staggering cost-of-living pressures so many in our state are currently suffering through?

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

- (1)–(2) No. Western Power is not able to pay for the poles. That is not possible under the legislation in Western Australia. Western Power can invest only in its own infrastructure; it cannot pay for other people's infrastructure. Again, I do not understand why the member would raise that. I know many people do not realise that they own the pole themselves, but they are called consumer poles for a reason; they are owned by the consumer. The member talked about the Parkerville Supreme Court decision. On appeal, the Supreme Court overturned the understanding of Western Australian law. There had been an understanding that Western Power was not responsible for the safety of the first pole, but the Supreme Court on appeal decided that Western Power is obligated to ensure the safety of the first pole on the consumer's property. Some rural properties might have seven, eight or nine consumer poles. Western Power is not responsible for the safety of those poles, but it is responsible for the safety of the first pole. That means that it cannot, by the rule set down by the Supreme Court, attach its infrastructure, that is, the cable, to a pole if the pole is not safe. Under the decision of the Supreme Court, Western Power is obligated to do an inspection of all these poles. It is working through that in a systematic manner. Poles considered too dangerous are taken out of service. For a pole that is considered to be at risk, 120-day, 90-day, 60-day and 30-day notices are given to those people.

The government understands that not all consumers are in a position to replace the pole. Therefore, Western Power has a hardship program. For those consumers who cannot afford to replace the pole, Western Power can enter into an agreement with them to deal with that. Imagine that someone had a property worth millions and millions of dollars; no-one would expect the taxpayers of Western Australia to pay for infrastructure owned by that multimillionaire property owner. We have to have a proper scheme. The scheme is aimed at those in hardship, and that might be income hardship, because they might be asset rich but income poor. Western Power is working with individuals on that. I did not see the report last night, but obviously it has been shared with me by my office. I was surprised at the nature of that report, given this matter has been running for some time. The member for Kalamunda did a grievance some time ago, and arising from the grievance from the member for Kalamunda, Western Power introduced the hardship scheme and changed the notice arrangements. I was surprised that the news report last night raised that as though it was a new issue.