

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

### *Statement*

**HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.45 pm]: This evening, I would like to talk about renewable power. To start off, I would like to talk about my question without notice today. It was a simple question —

What was the power output of the Collgar wind farm for the trading intervals between 9.30 am and 10.30 am on Sunday ...

The answer was —

The Collgar windfarm is not a state-owned asset. I would refer the honourable member to the Australian Energy Market Operator, which is the independent market operator.

That was answered by Hon Stephen Dawson on behalf of the Minister for Energy. It just so happens that I asked exactly the same question in February last year. The only difference was the date and time. The answer I got 20 months ago was —

It was 0.122 megawatt hours for the trading interval from 4.00 to 4.30 pm on 1 February 2019.

I can only assume that the Minister for Energy's office or his department was so busy that they could not even phone AEMO and ask about the power usage or what was being generated at the time, so I was very disappointed with the answer. I asked the question because I had flown over the Collgar wind farm on Sunday and I could not believe that all the turbines were sitting idle except for maybe two or three. I believe they were undergoing maintenance at the time. There was a 206-megawatt monument, costing \$750 million, doing absolutely nothing.

I would like to move on to remind us about Hon Tim Clifford when he spoke about shutting down the gas industry in his member's statement a couple of weeks ago. I respect Hon Tim Clifford; he wants to push renewable energy. I reckon that is great because he has young children and I have grandchildren and we all want the best for them. However, I wonder whether he has looked at the consequences of shutting down the gas industry. The job losses alone would be in the thousands—thousands of people would be unemployed. The City of Karratha would empty basically overnight. It would also devastate some of the Third World countries that rely on our gas so that people there can do their cooking. There would be a huge slowdown in some of the First World countries. But worst of all, Australia would suffer economically. It would be an absolute disaster. Many countries would revert straight to coal, increasing the CO<sub>2</sub> problem we already have.

It may interest the chamber to know—there are probably not too many people left who would be interested; hopefully Hansard is interested—that here in WA, more than 69 per cent of people use gas for cooking, baking and their hot water systems. That is 69 per cent in Western Australia. Half the number of households in Australia use mains gas as a source of energy for all their cooking and residential requirements. Bottled gas is the second most efficient energy source for hot water systems. It is also one of the cheapest forms of energy. Imagine what would happen if we shut off the gas supply. At home, I have a gas oven and cooktop, and a gas hot water system. It would cost me thousands to get an electrical contractor in just to run the electric cables. I would then need to buy a new electric oven and cooktop, and a new electric hot water system. The only person who would benefit from that is probably Harvey Norman. Where will this extra electricity come from? A normal cooktop uses around six kilowatts, an oven uses about five or 5.7 kilowatts, and a hot water system uses about 3.6 kilowatts if it is storage. People could get an electric instantaneous hot water system, but in that case they would need to put a house brick on top of the kilowatt hour meter so that it did not come flying out of the meter box when they were using hot water. It would be an absolute disaster if we had to get rid of gas.

I read in Saturday's *Kalgoorlie Miner* that Synergy lost \$657 million last year. This year, the loss was not so bad, because it was propped up by \$135.9 million from the state government. The Synergy chief executive, Jason Waters, said he expected challenges with residential collections in the coming year related to moneys owed by households who would ordinarily be disconnected. I cannot believe that in 2020 we are still disconnecting power from people's homes because they cannot afford to pay their bill. I remember growing up in the 1960s when people used to be evicted from their home. I would be walking home from school and I would see a couple of chairs and tables and some old mattresses, and some very old suitcases filled with the rags that these people wore, out on the street, rain would be pouring down, and nobody cared. That should not be happening now. When I read that these people would normally be disconnected, I thought we have not really come far out of the cave, have we?

The article also referred to the trend towards renewables. The complaint is that 269 megawatts of power is being generated by solar panels, and this is creating a huge problem. The comment that struck me the most was that the problem with power generation at the moment, and the increased supply from more expensive sources, including power purchase agreements from the wholesale electricity market, and gas generation assets, is absolutely killing it. Those are the key words. The power purchase agreements are absolutely shocking. To top it off, Alinta Energy is building the Yandin wind farm at Dandaragan. It will take over 15 000 hectares of land to build that 240 megawatt

wind farm. I asked myself: why would Alinta, which runs gas-powered generator plants, be building a wind farm? That absolutely bamboozled me. I could not work it out, so I started reading a bit about it. I then read that Western Power is going to build 10 kilometres of transmission line for 330-kilovolt powerlines. That is the highest voltage power that we generate in Western Australia. I want members to think of the biggest electricity pylons that they have ever seen. Western Power is going to build 10 kilometres of those power lines. It will cost us millions of dollars to do that.

When I read on, I worked out why that will be so lucrative for Alinta Energy to do. The government of Western Australia has just entered into a 15-year power purchase agreement. That is terrible news. I could not believe that we would subsidise Alinta Energy, which is a Chinese company. It was bought for \$4 billion, just recently, actually. We will subsidise the building of this plant, and we will pay for that energy for 15 years. For a lot of that time, we will not need that energy. The federal and state governments should keep right out of renewable power sources. Let the markets decide. That is the only way to keep electricity prices down. If they can make money out of wind and solar plants, they will build them. If they can make money out of coal or gas plants, they will build them. Power purchase agreements are heavily weighted in favour of renewable energy companies. Thank you.