

STREET LIGHTING — CONNOLLY, HEATHRIDGE AND EDGEWATER

Grievance

MS E.L. HAMILTON (Joondalup) [10.09 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Energy on behalf of local residents across our Joondalup community, in particular the suburbs of Connolly, Heathridge and Edgewater. Residents in my community have significant concerns regarding a lack of street lighting in their area, and I have been advocating on their behalf for quite some time now. I first raised the matter with then Minister for Energy, Hon Ben Wyatt, in June 2018, who had Western Power conduct a site visit. I subsequently followed this matter up with you, minister, in 2020; in fact, this is my second grievance on this matter. It has now been four years since I initially raised this matter. I continue to hear from residents who are concerned about their safety.

The issue now stretches across several suburbs in my electorate and, in some parts of the suburb of Joondalup, residents can barely see where they are walking at night. Following my advocacy in 2020, the minister informed me that Western Power had found that although Connolly's major roads were adequately lit, several cul-de-sacs and no-through roads were unlit beyond the intersection. The minister also informed me that the City of Joondalup has full responsibility for the placement and number of streetlights and early upgrades. I understand that Western Power replaced approximately 90 dim globes in Connolly in September 2020; however, new lights were not installed and existing lights were not upgraded. My constituents and I would like to understand why there has been no real improvement delivered, and, quite frankly, it is a significant safety issue. Joondalup is a wonderful community with lots of great local amenities and more people than ever are out and about in their local community. They should feel comfortable and confident in doing so after dark.

I was astonished to hear that the City of Joondalup wishes to take over all streetlights in the city, with council requesting that officers complete an evaluation of this. The City of Joondalup's vision for the underground power program seeks to underground all remaining overhead power and bring all streetlights under the ownership of the city. The plan also includes upgrading streetlights to modern Australian standard LED lights. The city seems to believe it can do a better job than Western Power, but given its failure to increase lighting in Connolly, I think this is extremely problematic and not in the best interests of ratepayers. The council has a legislative responsibility to plan for our communities and has not done so. I understand that the ownership of street lighting has been discussed before, but the idea never progresses because of the impracticalities for local government. Streetlights are not a money-making asset for local governments; they are a liability that the city has no expertise in administering or maintaining. Why would the City of Joondalup consider investing rates paid by residents into infrastructure that is already provided by the state government? Could the minister explain what benefits this could offer ratepayers and what is being done to deliver benefits under Western Power's ownership model? I would also like the minister to please explain what Western Power is doing to ensure that streetlights continue to evolve. I believe one of the key issues here is that streetlights in Joondalup were installed around 20 years ago and are no longer sufficient for a more densely populated community; however, the city is still pursuing more infill across its suburbs.

I have spoken on this matter on a number of occasions in this place and shared my strongly held views that any increase to density and infill needs to be done in strategic city centres, be of good quality and have adequate infrastructure that will not detract from the amenity of the suburb. I am of the view that the current street lighting arrangements are not suitable for current residents, let alone an increased number. At a recent meeting of the Connolly Residents Association, the Mayor of Joondalup, Albert Jacob, spoke about the city taking ownership and management of street lighting where there is underground power, and Connolly being an ideal example to use as a model to implement this. Mayor Jacob followed the point by noting the plan would require state government support. It also should be noted that Mayor Jacob, in his re-election campaign, spruiked the benefits of underground power and LED lighting upgrades for existing streetlights, but we know that additional poles are necessary to provide adequate lighting in our community, and it appears that the city has failed to come to the table in this regard.

I also note that the City of Joondalup seems to be dealing with street lighting upgrades in conjunction with a very different program, that being underground power. The city has been paralysed on underground power since its foundation. Several original residents of Heathridge have pointed out that underground power was promised when they purchased their blocks back in the 1970s and 1980s, but it still has not been delivered. If the City of Joondalup's track record on underground power is any indication of how it plans to own and operate streetlights and how this will turn out, I must say that I will be buying quite a large torch when I go on my night-time walks with my dogs. While the city dithers and delays on providing adequate street lighting to our local communities, it has undertaken multimillion-dollar splurges on streetlights in the Joondalup city centre—a vanity project perhaps to satisfy the ivory tower of Boas Avenue—all while residents in the suburbs wait for well-lit streets.

I wish to resolve this matter as soon as possible; it has taken too long. I seek the minister's advice on how we can come to a positive solution that ensures the best interests of residents are protected.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [10.14 am]: I thank the member for Joondalup very much for the grievance, and her constant advocacy on behalf of residents in her electorate. I know they are very fortunate to have a person of her capability and hard work advocating on their behalf.

Street lighting is obviously an issue that is more complex than the City of Joondalup seems to understand. The member previously grieved to me on this topic. I pointed out at that time that the city has an obligation to fix these issues. I understand that at the moment the lighting in Connolly is not to Australian standards, and it is the responsibility of the council to provide the lighting. I do not understand why the council mixes up the question of undergrounding power with its existing obligation to provide adequate street lighting. I urge the local government to meet this basic requirement to its residents in Joondalup and provide minimum levels of street lighting.

I note that the council has done a study into undergrounding power and it wants to take over the power infrastructure, but it has worked out it cannot afford to do that. It is probably right, because at the moment the overhead infrastructure in many of the suburbs in Joondalup is not currently due to be replaced. The WA government, of course, is the only government in Australia that has an active program to underground power infrastructure, and we continue with that active program. I urge the City of Joondalup to engage with Western Power on that. The City of Subiaco provided underground power for all its residents many years ago, not by taking ownership, but by funding the project and getting it done. That means the residents end up paying a higher cost. I am not saying that would be in the best interests of Joondalup residents, but that would be a solution.

I note we are currently going through the next process of reviewing the rules to apply to Western Power under access arrangement 5. I note that the Western Australian Local Government Association has made a submission to the current process, as has the Shire of Mingenew. It is the first time the shire has made a submission, and I am told it is the first time that any local government authority has specifically made a submission to the process of the regulatory rules that apply to Western Power, so I urge other councils to join that process. The City of Joondalup could do that already if it wanted to. I note, too, that the former Liberal government, I think in 2018, announced it would sell all the streetlight infrastructure, but it never proceeded with that because it found it too difficult to do that.

In the end, what the Mayor of the City of Joondalup appears to be doing is creating a straw man. He is saying that the problem is undergrounding power. Certainly, underground power is important, and the residents in Joondalup should be confident that over a longer period the government has a program to do that, but it is not going to happen soon. That is a separate issue from the council's current obligation to provide adequate street lighting.

I note the amount of money the council spent on poles in its CBD project. Very expensive poles are used to light the CBD. I do not think the member is asking for that high-cost solution, just an adequate solution. The council needs to step up. I cannot believe the council is still worried about things that might happen in the future, rather than worrying about what is happening now.

I will just make some other comments. LED luminaries are now the standard. Western Power replaces traditional failed luminaries only with LEDs. We have entered into an agreement with a number of councils to trial the replacement of the existing luminaries with LEDs to see how that goes. We are working with Canning, Melville, Armadale, Cockburn and Albany. The Western Australian government has put \$1.35 million into that project to cover 50 per cent of the writedown costs. The local governments are accepting the other 50 per cent of the writedown costs on that project, as well as the new investments. Western Power now has a much higher standard for new build streetlights to take account of newer technologies and lower energy use. Synergy has a special tariff for councils that use LEDs. I make it clear that streetlight tariffs are not a metered product; they are a calculated product. There is no meter that councils have their electricity go through. It is a calculated tariff so that if councils move to LEDs, they can get the benefit of the lower cost electricity at the same time. They will use less electricity and it will be delivered at a lower cost.

In the end, I would urge the Mayor of Joondalup to not grandstand but to solve the problem. The problem is that the people in the member's electorate are not getting adequate lighting today. The mayor has it in his power to solve that problem today. We can deal with what will happen to the future of underground power later. The idea that the mayor wants to wait for a decade to solve the member's constituents' problems today does not make any sense.