

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

503. Mr H.T. JONES to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitments to providing a safe, affordable and reliable power supply to all Western Australians. Can the minister update the house on the work underway to prevent power outages like those that occurred over Christmas last year, and can the minister advise the house how this work will help maintain Western Power's 99.9 per cent network reliability?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I thank the member for the question. I know that the Christmas outages particularly impacted his constituents. I have previously apologised for the outages over Christmas, and I make it clear to people that I understand completely that it is never convenient to be without power. In a modern society, we are very dependent on electricity, and so an outage has a greater impact than it might have had 20 or 30 years ago. Of course, that larger volume of demand for electricity is one of the challenges that we have to deal with. I make it clear, too, that as demonstrated by the independent review of the Christmas outages, there was no one reason, not one cause, for outages in different locations.

Through Western Power, we are reinforcing the grid in the locations that it had those different outages. We have upgraded substations at Clarkson, Byford and Yanchep to make sure that those substations can carry greater loads. We are reinforcing the Waikiki substation, because that is an important element in the supply of power to the southern suburbs. People should understand that a substation in one location can have an impact on the network for many kilometres around; it is not just in that particular suburb. We are also installing new feeders in Mandurah, Byford, Waikiki and Henley Brook. That gives Western Power new options for feeding electricity in different pathways, because the high level of visibility Western Power has on the transmission infrastructure means that it can observe when there is an overload situation. By switching the load from one location to another, it can provide increased reliability. For areas such as Byford, where there is limited capacity to move electricity around because the population is less dense than in other areas such as the CBD, that will now give Western Power greater options to pass electricity around an individual outage and an individual location.

Is it not remarkable that even with the Christmas outages, Western Power has been able to achieve a greater than 99.9 per cent reliability for all customers in its network? Its target is 99.8 per cent reliability, so to achieve 99.9 per cent reliability is remarkable. Of course, if you are without power, no amount of average reliability will make your outage any easier, but it simply is not possible to provide 100 per cent reliable electricity. We are trying to build resilience into the network so that we can cope with these changed electricity dynamics, because this is the result of climate change. As the climate changes, demand for electricity rises, and so we continue to build a more resilient network. As the source of electricity changes, as we have increased levels of renewable energy, we also have to change the network to take account of that. We are doing both things at the same time.