

ELECTRICITY — UNDERGROUND POWER

**375. Ms E.L. HAMILTON to the Minister for Energy:**

I refer to this Labor government's commitment to providing a safe, reliable and affordable electricity system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on this government's work to make underground power more accessible and equitable for households across the state?
- (2) Can the minister outline what these important upgrades will mean for thousands of Western Australians?

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

- (1)–(2) I appreciate the question. I know of the member's deep commitment to improving the situation for her constituents in respect of street lighting and other issues in the electricity area.

We know that undergrounding offers many benefits to the community. It is safer and more reliable and costs less to maintain, although, as the member for Cottesloe can tell us, when there is an outage, it takes longer to repair. It also helps the networks become more resilient to climate change and extreme weather events. Since the state underground power program began in 1996, over 100 000 properties have transitioned to underground power. We are the only state that has a structured process to underground existing suburbs. In November last year, I announced that the existing underground power projects would be replaced by the targeted underground power program, the TUPP. This program is being led by the network and supersedes the pre-existing state underground power program. It has certain improvements. It targets projects to the oldest areas of the network where the aboveground infrastructure is in most need of replacement. That not only maximises the reliability benefit for the underground projects, but also increases the contribution Western Power can make to the projects. It means that there will be an increase in the capacity of Western Power to underground from an average of 4 000 properties a year to about 12 000 properties a year.

We have also reformed the state government contribution to fund underground power projects. The state government will offer funding on a tiered basis, informed by socio-economic indicators. That is to say that the state government will be making the largest contribution to the areas that are in most financial need.

I was pleased to make a further announcement recently regarding the targeted underground power project. Western Power secured agreement from nine local governments to participate in the TUPP—Bayswater, Canning, Melville, Rockingham, Stirling, Swan, Vincent, Bassendean and Victoria Park. The project areas in these LGAs have been identified based on the network need. The MOUs to formalise the intent of Western Power in each of the local governments and the state government are currently being developed. Scoping and planning works for some of these projects have begun, with the construction of the first project in Bassendean north set to begin in May next year. This is a significant improvement to the way the state underground power project works.

One of the first things that occurred when I became minister in 2018 was a mayor came to see me to complain about the contribution that was required from the local residents for that particular underground power project. Of course, the level had been set by the local government's bid to the former Liberal government. The point was that the new mayor came in to complain about what the previous mayor had proposed and had been agreed to by the former Liberal government. That was one of the problems. Because it was based on the interests of local government to make a contribution to the cost, it was pushing up the cost to residents. This new approach means that we can target support to people with the lowest means so that the lowest cost would be for people without means and only a reasonable contribution is asked from people with more resources. Because it has been driven by the needs of the network, we can do more. It is a much better outcome and it will allow for more rapid completion of the transition from overhead to underground in the metropolitan area.

**The SPEAKER:** I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition with the last question.