

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY — REGIONS

593. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Energy:

I refer to the review undertaken by Western Power and to the supply allocation of 32 amps for single-phase rural residential properties in Western Australia versus 63 amps for the cities. Will the minister heed the calls of regional families, the opposition and impacted regional businesses and finally deliver a level playing field by providing a 63-amp supply allocation across the whole of regional WA?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I want to thank a number of members in the chamber and members in the Legislative Council who have been talking to me about this matter for some time, particularly the member for Collie–Preston who, of course, was the first person to raise the issue with me. I have been asked about this issue in this chamber previously and I keep pointing out that this is not a question of policy; it is a question of the engineering of the system here in Western Australia. The 32-amp allocation for regional Western Australians has always been in place. The issue was that when a 32-amp safety switch was installed, we had some properties tripping off. I emphasise that that was not the Western Power network tripping off; it was the safety switch inside the home or business of the Western Power customer.

After the member for Collie–Preston and other members approached me, I raised this issue with Western Power and I asked it to review the engineering situation. Western Power has completed a thorough review of the situation and it has presented me with the outcomes, from which it has identified a pathway forward that continues the McGowan government's commitment to provide reliable and affordable power to all Western Australians regardless of where they live. We are able to do this because of the investment made by the government of Western Australia into advanced metering infrastructure for the electricity system in Western Australia. These telemetry upgrades for network resilience, as part of our accelerated AMI rollout in response to the *Distributed energy resources roadmap* and the broader energy transformation strategy that we have in Western Australia, now mean that Western Power is able to measure and model customer demand and network performance, which was never able to be done in the past. It is only because of the investments made by the McGowan Labor government that we are able to do these reviews.

The desktop review has now been completed and it found that with standardisation of the network design, as well as planning for load growth, we believe that we can increase the regional load from 32-amp single-phase to 63-amp single-phase, with some adjustments. To further assess the results of this desktop review, Western Power will now launch a pilot program to trial increasing rural supply allocations to 63 amps across parts of the south west and the wheatbelt region. The trial will run from now until 31 July 2023 across the following shires: Boyup Brook, Bridgetown–Greenbushes, Collie, Donnybrook–Balingup, Nannup, West Arthur and Williams. Performance of the network over the trial period will be assessed using smart technology, including the AMI infrastructure that has been paid for by the McGowan government. Upon completion of the trial, Western Power will provide me with its recommendations on the viability to increase the rural supply allocation to 63 amps across the entire south west interconnected system, identifying any areas where further network investment may be needed. Western Power will be releasing more details via its website.

I want to reiterate that safe, reliable and affordable electricity supply is a priority for this government. Main switch circuit breakers support the safety of the community and the network as they are designed to provide overload protection for a household if connection service capacity is exceeded, preventing significant outages and damage to equipment and appliances. Additionally, they ensure safe and equitable access to power supply for the whole community and support the growth of renewable energy and distributed energy resources such as rooftop solar and battery storage systems.

I want to thank the member for Collie–Preston in particular for the advocacy that she has made on this topic. We are confident that the decision of Western Power to trial this new approach is going to be successful because we now have the data available to us. That data is available only because of the investment of the McGowan Labor government into this new technology to allow us to better monitor the system. As long as the trial in those locations succeeds, we will be able to fully implement the new process from April next year.