

INFRASTRUCTURE — UNPLANNED OUTAGES

Motion

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.08 am] — without notice:
I move —

That the Legislative Council notes the frustration of Western Australians in relation to ongoing unplanned outages and unreliability of critical communications, energy and water infrastructure and calls on the government to address the redundancy, reliability and resilience of those services.

Even though it is a Thursday, I hope we can have a wideranging debate on the issues that we face here in Western Australia and the reliability of these services. I do not think there would be a member of the chamber who —
Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we allow the member on his feet to make his contribution in silence? Thank you.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: As I was saying, my intention with this motion was to open a quite wideranging debate around some of the challenges that the state faces in ensuring the reliability of the services mentioned in the motion. Over their time in Parliament every member of this place would have received correspondence about one of those issues and many of us would be receiving that correspondence very, very regularly. Some of those challenges and issues are not necessarily state issues, but they do require leadership from the state and its representatives in Parliament, which is all of us. Even though it is Thursday, my intention is to have an open discussion around some of these issues and some of the potential opportunities to try to address reliability and reduce unplanned outages.

We all know that there have been a number of significant events—some might say outlier events, but nonetheless significant events—involving weather, fire or failure of infrastructure that have led to extended outages of one or another of these services. The challenge for us is in trying to address those issues and finding out what can be done to reduce them; obviously, we are never going to eliminate all those outages.

The energy sector reports outages annually to the Economic Regulation Authority, and a number of different metrics are used in those reports. I refer to the Economic Regulation Authority's *Annual data report 2022/23—Energy distributors* of 20 December 2023. It is not so much the actual figures and the number and duration of outages, but the method by which they are reported under the Electricity Industry Code that I find interesting. It requires distributors to report on the duration and frequency of supply interruptions, including—and this is the interesting aspect of it, from my point of view —

- The number of customer premises that have had interruptions that exceed 12 hours continuously (referred to as an extended interruption).
- The number of customer premises that have had more than:
 - Nine interruptions per year in the Perth Central Business District (CBD) and urban areas.
 - 16 interruptions per year in all other areas of Western Australia.

Essentially, if there is an outage of 11 hours and 58 minutes, it is not going to be recorded in this report because it is not a 12-hour continuous outage. I am sure that data is available from our energy distributors and providers, but it seems quite interesting to me that they are only going to report outages of that duration. I would have thought that, in this day and age, a shorter outage than that is still significant, and that 16 interruptions per year in regional Western Australia is not really acceptable. In the day and age in which we live, when we rely on technology that, in turn, relies on that energy, it is not acceptable, in my book, to regard interruptions of up to 12 hours as being okay. Perhaps one way we can look at improving services would be to try to understand the full outage metrics and the duration and frequency of those outages. I mention that simply because I find it interesting that those metrics are reported in that way.

I want to talk a bit about communications because that is an area that I have a particular interest in. Members will recall a significant outage in Western Australia earlier in the year, in January. That resulted in widespread disruption to mobile and data communications services throughout regional Western Australia and the outer metro area. In that instance, more than 90 mobile base stations and 180 network sites were affected, and some of them remained offline for extended periods. Some of those services had battery backup but, of course, they only last for a while before they, in turn, run out of power.

Obviously, that is inconvenient; but more than that, it is extremely concerning that those outages also resulted in people being unable to make 000 emergency calls. I do not think anyone will disagree that an inability to make an emergency call is not acceptable at any level, because it puts community safety at severe risk. We need to find a way to —

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Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Darren West; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

Hon Darren West: That’s what happens when you privatise public assets.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: We can have a discussion about privatisation; I am sure the member will rise to his feet to talk about that! It is interesting. This is a Thursday, and as I said, this debate will be wideranging, President! I am sure that a government-delivered service would be far more reliable; we need only look at the energy network as a good example of how much more reliable that would be, given that it was not actually the telco, necessarily, that caused these outages, but the energy network, which is not privatised. But anyway, we will move on!

Obviously that caused significant distress and concern to many people. It is absolutely unacceptable that when we have storms, fires or other major events, people are unable to make 000 calls or receive notifications of potentially serious emergency threats. Our challenge is to find a way to make those services better. Many of us have had meetings with the telcos over that period. Certainly, I have raised those issues with as many bodies as I can: the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the federal government and the telcos themselves.

There are some developments happening within the telco space that are going to be quite interesting over the next couple of years and will, I think, certainly play a role in changing the investment profile, if you like, of network providers. As a state, we have to be ahead of that. At the very end of last year, just before New Year, a low-earth orbit satellite provider, SpaceX, launched its very first direct-to-handset satellites. These satellites communicate directly with ordinary mobile phone handsets, not satellite phones; ordinary Apple, Samsung or Google phones can talk directly to those satellites. Testing began on those systems in early January and that is ongoing.

I am going to quote from a PCMag article from 7 March this year. It relates to a report that the company delivered to the Federal Communications Commission in the US. It states —

SpaceX’s cellular Starlink system is thus far a “massive success, meeting or exceeding testing objectives ...

It is able to deliver data download speeds of 17 megabits. That may not seem as fast as a fixed internet provider or even a direct satellite provider, but this is an ordinary handset talking to a satellite. I think that is quite interesting. The article continues —

“Among other results, the satellites have been able to communicate with multiple models of unmodified Samsung, Apple, and Google devices using (T-Mobile’s) PCS G Block spectrum, including in urban and rural areas, indoors and outdoors, and in clear sky and under tree cover ...

We are talking about a service that does not rely on a terrestrial tower network but can talk to ordinary mobile phones and allow people a level of coverage that provides not only data but also the ability to make and receive phone calls and send and receive text messages. That is going to be a game-changer for remote areas of Australia, as it will be for the US. I know that a number of telcos have signed up to use that system when it comes on board, and there are other low-earth orbit satellite providers that are launching similar services.

That will provide the ability for someone in a remote area to have coverage, and it means we need to consider how we, as a state, will address the need for terrestrial services to be expanded and where it is best for us to invest. The state will have to invest in this; even though it is a federal responsibility, there must be a level of investment, at least in terms of planning, from the state government. How should we best invest in our terrestrial network to ensure that it will provide a level of robustness and coverage, but avoid building towers in areas that will be covered by this other system, which may well provide the coverage needed in those areas?

It is incumbent upon all of us to look at how we might invest in that system and partner with those telcos and hold them to account. Ultimately, they have to be held responsible for delivering that service. They may argue that building a battery that will last 48 hours to power a mobile tower is not warranted and is too costly. Perhaps this is an opportunity for the state and federal governments to partner with them. A three-way partnership in that sense would make a lot more sense. We are talking about not only outages, but also the demand on these services, which creates issues and challenges for communication. A recent example was in Esperance over the Christmas period when the Telstra coverage was absolutely appalling and many people could not make or receive calls. There were no outages at the time. The challenge was the congestion of the network. The argument put by the telco at the time was that there were a significant number of visitors in town. Actually, the number of visitors was down on previous years and those problems had not been experienced in the past. It turned out that the common denominator was the bad weather. Everyone was sitting at home or in their caravan watching Netflix. That placed such a load on the system that residents could not make phone calls or receive Facebook notifications, if they were inclined that way. To address that, the community raised significant concerns, and to its credit, the telco has agreed to look at providing additional base stations within the town’s CBD to take the load off some of the major towers.

On the issue of coverage, new technology offers us opportunities. My mother lives in Esperance and will be 74 years old in a couple of weeks. She lives only five kilometres from the major tower at Wireless Hill in Esperance. However,

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she cannot make, and has never been able to make, a mobile phone call even though she has line of sight to that tower. She lives just on the fringe of its transmission capabilities. The landline system she has near Pink Lake is also pretty unreliable and has provided a terrible internet service. It is very, very slow. She recently decided to go with the low-earth orbit satellite provider for her internet services. That has transformed her internet service, which is now good, and is able to make and receive phone calls from her mobile phone via that network at home. From my point of view, that is great because it means that should something happen, she can contact her loved ones and we can also contact her to make sure that everything is okay. We should not overlook the opportunities that new technologies currently provide and will provide in the future. The state and federal governments need to carefully plan their investment into future telecommunications infrastructure.

A lot of people ask me, and I am sure other members, why they cannot plug a generator in the nearest mobile tower when the power is out so they can just turn it on and get power. From the telcos' perspective, there are reasons that should not be done, such as the big generators requiring a certain level of power. Those sorts of systems need to be designed in conjunction with the telcos. More needs to be done to progress that with those telcos, which I find frustratingly slow in responding to those requests. I would not have thought it would be too hard in this day and age to design a system to provide backup power to those essential base stations during major outages. I am sure that all members are frustrated that in this day and age the technology exists, so it really should not be very hard to do. What is the hold-up with addressing that issue?

In bringing this to a head, my intention of the motion, as I said, was to have a wideranging debate. I hope we get some interesting contributions from all members on the challenges we face and how we might address them. Obviously, the last aspect of the motion calls on the government to address the issues of redundancy, reliability and resilience. I want to see a commitment to achieving a very strong partnership between state and federal governments to ensure that the telcos are held to account for the provision of what is a basic service now. It is not acceptable to suggest that mobile services are somehow nice to have, because there are so many people in our community who do not have any other form of telephone service, for want of a better term, who require that mobile service to make emergency calls and to stay safe. It is absolutely unacceptable that our telcos of all persuasions seem to think that the provision of mobile services is an optional extra in this day and age. I hope that we all agree that they should be held to account. We should ensure that the state and federal governments are doing their bit to make sure we can address potential issues down the track and that regardless of whether people live in the metropolitan or regional areas, they have reliable communication services so they can remain safe and contact emergency services whenever they need to. The state must ensure that it works to improve network reliability and reduces the frequency of unplanned outages of those services.

Visitors — Safety Bay Primary School

The PRESIDENT: I acknowledge in the public gallery the students from Safety Bay Primary School. You are very welcome to the Legislative Council.

Debate Resumed

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [10.26 am]: Welcome to the Legislative Council, Safety Bay Primary School.

I would like to thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this excellent motion to the house today. It reminds me of one we debated almost two years ago to the day on 16 March 2022 when I moved —

That this house recognises the vulnerability of the electricity network in regional Western Australia and calls on the state government to —

- (a) apologise to regional families, businesses and communities that have been impacted by frequent power outages;
- (b) identify what actions it is taking to improve network resilience and performance;
- (c) improve the extended outage payment to ensure equity in its application and relevance to the outage experienced; and
- (d) support an independent inquiry that examines the performance of Western Power and Horizon Power in providing safe and reliable power and looks at alternative systems that might deliver better outcomes.

This will be a good opportunity, two years on, to get a report from the government on how it is tracking. On 16 March 2022, the government did not support the motion. It amended it to insert words to congratulate itself on its performance. It will be interesting to see how much has changed on this issue two years later. I agree with Hon Colin de Grussa that networks will always be, and inherently are, vulnerable to disruption. It is a matter of how resilient we can build them and maintain them, but, more importantly, what we do and how we respond when

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we have a disruption, particularly an unplanned one and particularly of the scale that we saw in January this year when we had a severe weather event across a significant part of the south-west land division. We are told that these types of severe weather events will become more frequent and more severe. It is important to ask how we will respond and how prepared we are. Obviously, there are new threats to our critical networks such as cyber threats, including non-malicious cyber threats. We saw the catastrophic loss last year of the Optus network. It was not due to a cyber attack; it was because of a software update that took the whole network offline. This is not just about how the government can respond; it is particularly about how industry can respond and also how the community can respond.

During the severe weather in January, Telstra lost 180 network sites in Western Australia. I am aware of a letter to Minister Dawson, Minister for Emergency Services, from the CEO of Telstra, last week; it reads —

Annually, Telstra's infrastructure division InfraCo invests approximately \$40 million on batteries, replacing around one-seventh of our battery fleet each year to ensure optimal performance.

That is excellent, but it has not always been the case and that is the problem. Sites in Western Australia have very depleted and, by design, very minimal battery performance. Some of the early sites were engineered for only three hours of battery backup, and with depleted, aging batteries, you might have only a matter of minutes, not hours, of backup, and even three hours at peak performance is not long.

The letter goes on to say —

Telstra is upgrading more than 100 base stations across Western Australia to a minimum 12-hour battery back-up ...

I think that is a good standard to accept for now because we have a long way to go to replace and improve the resilience of many thousands of network sites across Australia. At least 12 hours will give people time to assess an outage and make plans, potentially, to mobilise portable generation to maintain that critical infrastructure.

During the severe weather, a significant number of communities were isolated. I quote from an update I, and probably all members, received on 18 January, a couple of days after the weather had gone through. A significant number of communities in my electorate, and almost entirely in my electorate, were in complete isolation. Not only had they lost mobile coverage, but also their exchange had gone down. Keep in mind that there is no universal service obligation for the mobile network, but there is for the exchange network. These communities—too many to list in the time I have—were completely isolated. People could not make a 000 call even if they wanted to.

It was interesting reflecting this morning on the debate from 16 March 2022 because a contribution in that debate said —

Everybody knows what the problem is. We have very long powerlines that do not deliver electricity 100 per cent of the time. We will have electricity for 99 per cent of the time. People living in regional Western Australia understand that. There is a risk in regional Western Australia that the power can go out, but I do not understand how people can lose hundreds of thousands of dollars or \$17 000 worth of vaccine; why not de-risk the business with a very small investment in a generator? It makes no sense why people do not do that, because there will be days when there is no power. It just takes a falling branch or a motorist running into a powerline. There could be a thousand reasons why very long powerlines could short out.

That was almost two years ago to the day. It will come as no surprise that the sage advice on that day to buy a generator came from Hon Darren West. The problem is that the government's own Water Corporation did not take Hon Darren West's advice. During the severe weather event and related power outage, the Water Corporation issued daily updates to say that people would run out of water. It is not enough that people do not have power, a mobile service or an exchange line to call 000. PS: we did not listen to Hon Darren West and we will run out of water, too, so turn the tap off.

The last thing that I want to finish on is extended outage payments. In the course of the debate two years ago, the government said that it was reviewing extended outage payments, but the independent Shepherd inquiry was not charged with reviewing those payments. When I asked the government later that week how it had reviewed the extended outage payments, which went from \$80 to \$120, the response was that it was cabinet-in-confidence. I suspect that there was not a review. I suspect all there was was a government decision to increase the payment from \$80 to \$120. I still believe that it is grossly inadequate, and in many cases it lacks relevance to the outage experienced.

A question was asked yesterday: from 1 January 2024 to yesterday, how many claims have been made for an extended outage payment? In not quite the middle of March, we are up to claims of \$7.5 million in Western Australia for two and a half months to date.

Hon Darren West: Is that too much or not enough, because you have had both positions?

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Darren West; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Hon Darren West, \$120 is not enough. If someone is without power for days, weeks or, in some instances, months, \$120 is not enough. The government said that it would review it, but it would not tell us what the review was, just that the amount increased from \$80 to \$120.

To top it off, I asked the question yesterday relating to Western Power: why can people not make a claim until their power comes on? In January, I did not have power for 11 days. I qualified for the extended outage payment on the first day. It took only 12 hours, but I could not make a claim until 11 days later when the power came back on. Why? The minister in question time said, through the parliamentary secretary, that there is no requirement, but if people go to Western Power's website, which I checked this morning, Hon Darren West, a claim cannot be submitted for an extended outage payment without having the date on which power was restored. The website will not allow people to click send. Go try! The government needs to do better in this regard.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.36 am]: I rise in support of this motion. I think "noting the frustration of Western Australians" is to some extent an understatement. With all respect to Hon Colin de Grussa, I suggest that we could possibly add "quite legitimate". I am sure that he was very measured in his presentation today. We could also add "and despair", particularly for people who live in the goldfields. Sadly, the goldfields community has become something of a perverse experiment by the Western Australian Labor Party in trialling people's tolerance of power outages. I do not know how else to explain why we have seen such cavalier disregard of the terrible consequences of unreliable power and the treatment of people in the goldfields, even by members who represent the area.

We have seen a series of outages in the goldfields. In 2022, there was a series of outages and local retailers, not-for-profit groups and other groups lost a significant amount—tens of thousands of dollars—in lost revenue and lost opportunity. They also experienced a considerable amount of discomfort, concern and associated problems. At the time, there was a considerable community backlash. I went there with Dr David Honey and met with the community at the local chamber of commerce, which kindly hosted a meeting. I know members opposite made certain mocking comments about the forum that was held, but the community came together and demanded that things be done better. At the time the then minister made certain undertakings about what would be done. In fact, I visited the TransAlta facility at Parkeston. We talked to the private sector about how they might be able to do things better, because we know that considerable generation capacity resides at Parkeston. They have an incredible piece of technology up there that could potentially and did eventually provide some support during the most recent power outage. At the time, the minister made all sorts of undertakings. There was going to be additional renewable energy coming in, it would be able to provide backup, and the government was going to do all these things. We heard the usual catcheries of the Labor Party coming out and saying, "We're going to do all this; we're going to make sure that the backup generation capacity is there, and Kalgoorlie will be able to work." It said that there is a facility there that could operate at a time when that transmission line was down, and all sorts of reassurances were given. Of course, we know what happened in January. We had pathetic responses to that by ministers in the other place, kind of blaming the weather event, saying that it is climate change causing this. It is always using these sorts of, you could say, ideologically —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Because that's what happened. We are stating the facts. You make things up.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Here we go. That is exactly what I said; that is exactly what happened. What happened was there was a storm event, and you could not get a backup power generation facility to work. That is what happened. You could not get a backup generation to work. This is the kind of cover —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NEIL THOMSON: This is despite the timing and the considerable warning. We know these events happen. It is called the weather, folks! It happens. It happens on a regular basis that there is some disruption in that transmission line.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: The confected outrage of the minister opposite! He is constantly using defences which are undefendable, because the issue is you could not get the backup system to work. Despite your assurances, you were incompetent in relation to that matter.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Point of order. The honourable member just called me incompetent. I would ask him to withdraw that immediately.

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The PRESIDENT: The minister has asked for the comment to be withdrawn. I do agree that it could be considered — Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, seriously, I do agree that it could be considered unparliamentary, at the very least. I invite the honourable member to withdraw the comment and continue with his remarks.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: With respect to any personal implication that was taken, President, I withdraw. But —

The PRESIDENT: There is no but and this is not debatable. I have invited you to withdraw.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: You have withdrawn, and I invite you to continue with your remarks on the topic of the motion.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Thank you, President.

The PRESIDENT: On the topic of the motion.

Debate Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: On the topic of the motion, in the general context of the incompetence of the WA Labor government, I suggest that it is deeply incompetent in the delivery of backup facilities. That is quite clear. Let us just focus on, in the remaining time that I have —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Why don't you focus on the motion?

Hon NEIL THOMSON: What I was going to focus on before I was interjected on by the minister, who is very unparliamentary in his conduct here today, is the fact that there is a genuine issue of great pain and frustration and despair for people in the community of Kalgoorlie. For example, the local butcher, Steve McKenny, who serves that community very well with his supplies of meat and obviously provides affordable food to that community, had to throw out \$100 000 of stock. That really impacts on a small business. The IGA in Kalgoorlie had to throw out about \$80 000 of stock, as well. Elderly people had to suffer in 43-degree heat without any form of air conditioning. The local pharmacy had to throw out all its medicines that were required to be kept cool. That created an issue in that it disrupted the supply of those medicines. These are real-world consequences of an incompetent Labor government being unable to deliver on a simple job that it had. It had two years' warning to make sure that that backup facility actually worked.

This is a great warning to this Western Australian Labor government. I understand that operations at Lynas had to be suspended for some time as there were power distribution issues; they had to make sure there was enough power. Once the power was eventually restored, there was a curtailment of activities. I do not know what planet some of the members opposite live on, but I suggest they need to live on a planet on which they read some of these articles and conduct themselves by engaging with the business and local communities on the impacts of this. For example, we saw a headline in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* that —

Spirits low among business owners after blackout, with some considering closing doors for good

That is not me speaking; that is the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia speaking. Some businesses are considering closing their doors for good, because it is just an ongoing thing. What do we have instead? On 27 January 2024, we had this photo, which I found absolutely astounding. The headline states —

Kalgoorlie Health Campus' MRI machine back up and running following power outage woes

I do not know whether it was someone from the minister's office who sent the photo, but there is a photo of Mark McGowan, the Premier and Ali Kent, the member for Kalgoorlie, standing there next to an MRI machine. I could not believe it. They are trying to bring back the ghost of Mark McGowan, as if that is somehow going to solve problems. You will not have —

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Hon Neil Thomson.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Thank you. The reality is that that MRI machine went down. This is a real-world impact. We know it is not just in the regions. This is just a test of what is coming our way. Recently, on International Women's Day, I was at an event. The power was out for 20 minutes. People were stuck in lifts throughout the CBD. I have family who work in the construction sector. People were stuck on climbers up the side of buildings. This is a very serious issue. We must do better. Yes—inevitably, sometimes a system will fail, but there is absolutely no confidence in the Western Australian government. In this vital undertaking that is happening right now and the transition to our renewable sector, we know that there will be massive pressures on the network, yet we cannot even keep the backup systems operating in Kalgoorlie. That should be condemned.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Darren West; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

HON LOUISE KINGSTON (South West) [10.47 am]: I rise to also support this motion. I have lived in regional Western Australia all my life, most of it in Albany, which had absolutely woeful power almost all my life. It was a fairly common occurrence that we did not have power. Since moving to Manjimup in 2001, a fairly small community, the amount of power outages and major power outages we have had there is something to behold, that is for sure.

I will tell some stories about some of the circumstances that I and others have found ourselves in when trying to access some of these services. I was at home one day; it was a hot day and the power went out. That is pretty normal. I was working away, doing stuff on the farm. I was totally unaware that there was a fire bearing down on me. I had gone outside. I had been working, doing all manner of stuff. I did not get time to get all the fire equipment prepared, because the warning system had gone down. Some of the towers had been taken out. There was no power, no internet, no phone—no nothing. My mum actually heard about it on the radio and rang my daughter, who was in town at work, and she had to drive out and tell me that basically I had to evacuate, because I was not anywhere near ready. Thankfully, they pulled the fire up before it got to our place, but that was a pretty scary situation because I could have been inside and not aware of what was going on.

Water in Manjimup is a really interesting issue. Manjimup has an industrial area that does not have enough water to run even the existing businesses, let alone when we might need it for fire suppression. All the businesses have been required to put in an independent water system at great cost to allow them to be safe during a disaster or a fire. It cost the last business that put in a system over \$1 million. We are talking about trying to provide places for people to start businesses and live in regional Western Australia, particularly with the closing of the timber industry and the need to develop new industries, but none of the issues with these core services ever seem to be rectified or resolved. In my previous job, I do not know how many letters I wrote over the years about that, and nothing ever seemed to happen. It is really frustrating that we find ourselves in this situation. I go back to Telstra; thankfully its call centres are back in Australia. At one stage we had issues with our Telstra services and I spent three days on the phone trying to get through to somebody who could at least understand English. That was the first challenge. The second challenge was that the calls kept dropping out. I had to ring back over and over, and without any resolution. It took days of unpaid hours to try to get the situation resolved.

Just recently I did a trip through the south west and visited the local chip factory in Manjimup. I was shocked to learn that when there are periods of over-demand in the system, the factory is asked to shut down. I could not believe that a business would have to close down. They are the ones that employ people and pay fees, charges and taxes to government to provide the service in the first place. They then get paid to close down. It does not make any sense whatsoever. The factory is asked to do that to make sure that the city area has power all the time. Regional Western Australia is always paying for any inefficiencies in the system. I note what Hon Martin Aldridge said about how generators were suggested for these businesses. This is a massive factory, so a generator is not an option. But after an eight-day outage a couple of years ago, almost every business in Manjimup now has a generator. The lines had not been maintained through some of the forested areas and a storm took out the power in the whole region for eight days. I think we could apply for \$80 to cover lost goods, but there was no actual compensation for businesses. That was an interesting challenge as well. We had eight days when all our businesses were not operating. Members can imagine the cost to our community, not to talk about all the other outages, particularly the recent one we had when people were without power.

If my fire story is not scary enough, I will tell members another one. A number of times I have been at the speedway — Several members interjected.

Hon LOUISE KINGSTON: Yes, it can be scary at the speedway; I agree with that, particularly when children are racing and the power goes out in the middle of one of their races. They cannot see what they are doing. All you can hear is the crunching of metal and you pray that nobody has been seriously injured. Consequently, all the speedways now have lighting towers in the middle of the tracks. Most of our regional speedways cannot access those regional towers locally, so they have to bring them in from other regional areas such as Bunbury and Kalgoorlie and all those sorts of places depending on where they are. That is at a great cost to the clubs, because lighting towers are very expensive to access. I think the last one, when I was involved, cost in the vicinity of \$4 000 for a race meeting. Small clubs are providing a volunteer service and events —

Hon Kyle McGinn: They're doing a light project in Manjimup now to upgrade the lights at the speedway.

Hon LOUISE KINGSTON: Yes, but it will not help if Western Power turns the power off.

Hon Kyle McGinn: They were also talking about a generator.

Hon LOUISE KINGSTON: Yes, that will definitely help.

Hon Kyle McGinn: I'm pretty sure they're fixing some of those issues across the speedways.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Darren West; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

Hon LOUISE KINGSTON: That will definitely help, but it still does not alter the fact that when the power goes out, they cannot run a race meeting anyway.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! This is not a casual chat across the chamber; it is in fact a debate, and Hon Louise Kingston has the call.

Hon LOUISE KINGSTON: That will definitely help, but it still does not alter the fact that if we had a reliable power source, we would not need the generators or the lighting towers in the middle. The extra cost associated with that is definitely problematic.

We know, through members who have spoken this morning, that those stories are repeated over and over in regional Western Australia. It was also mentioned that we need a clear plan going forward. We are moving into a space of different types of energy generation that, in a lot of instances, will not be as reliable as what we are seeing now. It is clear that this situation is not being managed properly. The government needs to look at the situation in regional Western Australia and find some solutions. It will not come as any surprise to members opposite that I am passionate about other options in the alternative power generation area, and I am very much looking forward to members opposite catching up with me. Western Australians deserve better.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.56 am]: I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion today. I wish his mum, our mutual constituent, a happy seventy-fourth birthday next week. I hope she has a lovely day.

Apart from that, I feel for anyone who might have been listening in. That was 40 minutes of nothing, really. I mean, we all know the problems. We know that when we have the largest electricity network in the world, with 860 000 poles that cover a vast swag of country—nowhere bigger—every now and then part of it will not work. I can also let the opposition know—this is something it may not have caught up on yet, so listen up—that electricity is very dangerous. People die when they come in contact with large voltages of electricity, so whenever there is a dangerous situation on the world’s largest network, we turn the network off. Of course, we recognise that power outages are frustrating and inconvenient for members of the public and our customers, and in an ideal world we would have 100 per cent reliability, but we only have 99.93 per cent reliability because of the physics of moving electrons instantly from where they are generated to where they are used.

I know this is a little too much for members opposite, but I will also let them in on something else that was pointed out today. All we heard were the problems of a privatised organisation compared with a publicly owned organisation. The solution from members opposite was to go to the 2017 election with a policy to sell Western Power. That was their solution; to just hive it off to somebody else and when something goes wrong, do not look at them; talk to the new owners of the power network. We do not agree with that. We reversed that decision and we still have Western Power in public hands. That is a great outcome for regional Western Australia, because when the power goes out, people ring us, we get on to it, we get on to the minister’s office and Western Power and we fix those issues as quickly as we can. That is because the people own Western Power. Members opposite know it. Compare that with the service they get when they ring their local member of Parliament when the power is out. We get those wonderful Western Power crews, workers from all over the state, who drop what they are doing and come and get the power back on. Does that happen in privately owned organisations? Of course it does not, because their obligation, under law, is to the shareholders who own those companies. Our obligation, as owners of Western Power, is to the customers of Western Australia, and that is the fundamental difference that members of the opposition just cannot seem to get their heads around, but the people affected in regional Western Australia know full well. That is why we have chosen to keep Western Power in public hands. That is why we have brought workers from the Water Corporation and Main Roads Western Australia back in-house because we know that this delivers a better service for regional Western Australians. Members opposite will work it out one day, and I wish them well on that journey. Members opposite took a policy to sell Western Power to the 2017 election. It was a shameful policy, and, as far as I know, that is still the coalition’s policy.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes. I will leave that for somebody else.

We know that power outages are frustrating and inconvenient. People ring us and tell us, and we get onto them as soon as we can. Our lives have become more connected by, and reliant on, electricity. We acknowledge that, and we take responsibility for that, and we apologise when the power goes out, and we own that and fix it, particularly in regional and remote parts of the state. Someone pointed out earlier that no electricity system anywhere in the world is invincible. No electricity system anywhere has 100 per cent reliability. Our system has 99.93 per cent reliability, and I will concede that the further people live from the source of those electrons, the physics and the science says

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that the more likely it is they will have an outage. If a vehicle runs into a pole or a tree falls on a line, there will be an outage.

The other issue that we have had recently is pole-top fires. They have been quite widespread, including here in the metro area. They occur after a long, dry period when there is dust build-up on the poles, and misty rain and damp conditions can cause a spark or a short across the top of the pole. Across the network, we have 860 000 of these poles, and every now and then we will have pole-top fires. That will happen, and what we will do is we will get those fantastic crews. I think a few of our workers copped a bit of a bagging over the last half-hour from members opposite, but all our workers will get out there, replace those poles, get the power back on for people as quickly as they possibly can. As was mentioned, after the December 2021 outages, we engaged Michelle Shepherd to do a review on the causes of those outages. The review found that many of the outages were due to customer and network overloads, driven by unusually high electricity demand in residential areas. Western Power delivered an intensive program of works to address the report's six recommendations, such as improved forecasting practices, which have been modernised to take account of higher levels of rooftop solar and draw on data from advanced metering infrastructure. There is a new and improved bushfire response, which allows Western Power to restore power sooner following an outage without exposing its crews and the community to the risk of bushfire. Western Power strengthened its network infrastructure, with upgrades to 70 distribution transformers and substations in Mandurah, Waikiki, Yanchep and Byford. Western Power is building on these network upgrades, with dozens more distribution transformers set for replacement. Dozens of feeders—overhead power lines—have been upgraded right across the state. The changes implemented in response to the Shepherd report continue to deliver real benefits to Western Australia.

I will touch on the recent January supercell storm outages. We totally and unequivocally apologise to the people of Kalgoorlie for those extended outages. There was some ageing infrastructure that failed to fire. This is well documented. We take responsibility and ownership for that. The Premier went out there and announced that we will fix that problem. The problem was caused by a confluence of conditions, but one condition was that none of the other generators in Kalgoorlie have black-start capability, only the Synergy state-owned generator does. When that failed to start, we could not get a frequency to get all the other generators online. Western Power engineers and workers found a solution to get some power to Kalgoorlie. They set a frequency and were able to start the other generators. I thought that was a pretty ingenious idea. Members must remember that the towers that take the transmission line to Kalgoorlie are engineered for 260-kilometre-an-hour winds, and they crumpled like tinfoil, so it was not just an everyday storm cell. In fact, the last time that they collapsed, I am told, was in the 1980s.

We have owned the problem. We have found a temporary solution, and we are now going to do a permanent solution. Those generators were there not just during the term of this government; those ageing generators were there all the way through the Barnett and Court governments. It is one thing to point out a problem now, but we are going to fix it.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: When do you take responsibility?

Hon DARREN WEST: We have taken responsibility, and we are going to fix the problem.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Sandra Carr): Order! I am struggling to hear the member on his feet. Please, if we could just restore a bit of decorum.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Acting President.

We are about finding solutions. We are about making the system better. We are about keeping the system in public hands, which the public supports, and we will continue to do the good work. We will continue to support our workers in the power and telecommunications sector. I am not sure I heard too much support for our workers from members opposite just recently. In fact, I heard a very strange comment.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I am just telling members that electricity is dangerous as a lot of physics and science says. There will never be a system with 100 per cent reliability.

The critical infrastructure in Kalgoorlie was safely rebuilt and re-energised in just 10 days. That is a remarkable achievement with the damage that happened. Together with an innovative back-feeding solution, Western Power's work to restore power to the goldfields and wheatbelt was formidable. In the wheatbelt and Perth hills, Western Power staff worked tirelessly to repair hundreds of individual outages. Many crews spent the week away from their own families so that other Western Australians could be reconnected as soon as possible. Western Power crews were not alone in that work. They were supported by our emergency services, both on the ground and in Perth.

Point of Order

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Louise Kingston; Hon Darren West; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Dr Steve Thomas

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It appears that the member is a reading from a prepared speech, and I ask that he table it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Sandra Carr): Honourable member, under standing order 59, can you please advise whether the document you are reading from is a confidential document, or are you reading from your own notes?

Hon DARREN WEST: Acting President, I am reading from an aide-mémoire. They are my own notes that I have prepared specifically for this speech.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Acting President. I will continue.

Energy Policy WA played a coordinating role, and our regional energy provider, Horizon Power, sent some of its crews —

Point of Order

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I understand that the member previously claimed to be drawing his material from an aide-mémoire. An aide-mémoire is a prompt to the memory. It is very clear that the member is completely reliant on, and reading word for word, the document in front of him.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Honourable member, standing order 36 advises that you are not to read from a prepared speech, so I will just remind you that if it is an aide-mémoire, please use it accordingly.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Acting President. I do take the member's point, but these are my own notes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! I will just remind members to keep their gestures appropriate to context.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Acting President. We do love a good gesture in the Legislative Council. I think the word “electrons” may have triggered some people over there.

The point I am making, members, and why I referred to my notes, is that we appreciate the work of our Western Power workers. We appreciate those people who give up time with their families to work often in the rain or extreme heat and often under trying circumstances to get customers' power back on. I do not know whether that would be the case under a privatised Western Power. We do not know that, but I know that it is the case under a publicly owned Western Power. Right here, right now, I want to thank all of those workers. They will often drive down to our house to get out on the paddock and put the fuse on for a line that has dropped out. They work extraordinarily hard.

Western Power will always be criticised by those opposite. I think there is a fair case for dangerous situations caused by Western Power infrastructure. I am sure Hon Steve Martin knows about the Wickepin–Narrogin bushfire. With some justification, Western Power was blamed for that fire. The member can appreciate the balance that Western Power workers and network operators have to face. They cannot turn the power off every time there is a strong wind. There is risk in that network. As I said from the outset, members opposite will eventually work out that electricity is dangerous and can start fires. Every day, Western Power engineers, network operators and staff have to make calls about what is the most appropriate way to manage the network. It is a challenging task. What they got in return was 40 minutes this morning of getting bagged by people who bring no solutions. They point out the problem—we all know what the problem is and we apologise when the power goes out and we fix it. I have not heard a single solution today. We are working hard on solutions for Kalgoorlie. We know that it is a no-policy coalition. The only policy it has is to sell. It is the “for sale” opposition.

Hon Dan Caddy: They mentioned uranium mining this morning.

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes. Isn't that a good one?

I am very interested to know where those reactors might go. I can tell members opposite that it is not a viable solution and it is too expensive. In fact, I can tell members opposite that a thing called a “small nuclear reactor” does not yet exist. The federal Leader of the Opposition has recognised this and has now gone with the full nuclear option and plans to put nuclear reactors wherever there are coal-fired power stations. I am sure the people of Collie and Bunbury are delighted about this approach. We will see how that goes at the next federal and state elections.

The opposition is clueless when it comes to energy infrastructure. It does not offer us any solutions to telecommunications infrastructure, except to sell Telstra under the Howard years—changing the community service obligation to an obligation to work in the best interest of shareholders. To make it worse, it sold Telstra with no requirement to provide a 000 call service for mobile phone numbers. That was a pretty big call, not just to

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sell the then monopoly telecommunications utility, but to sell it without the requirement of 000 calls to mobile numbers. It was grossly irresponsible. I am not a fan of John Howard, other than his gun reform. I think that the sale of Telstra was the most dreadful decision ever made by a government for regional Australia, and still, the people in Western Australia vote for the coalition government that made the decision.

We agree in part that there is frustration from Western Australians when critical infrastructure goes down. We know that, but we own the problem and fix it. We work in the interests of regional Western Australians to get infrastructure back up and working. We proudly publicly own Western Power and the Water Corporation, and we are going to keep it that way.

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [11.13 am]: I was planning to leave this to my more knowledgeable colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas. I will be short and sharp so that he has an opportunity. That was an extraordinarily all-over-the-shop response from the government for a Thursday morning, even with speech notes. We heard from Hon Darren West about some of the reasons the power blacks out: a car can run into a pole or a tree can fall on a line. He finally got around to the Wickepin–Narrogin bushfire. He talked about the workers who were called out to fix the situation after the event.

I will tell members what actually happened. This is not from me or the media, it is from the government’s own media release with a big banner headline: “Western Power fined \$80,000 over Wheatbelt fire”. I quote —

Western Power was today fined \$80,000 after pleading guilty to failing to ensure network safety in relation to the Wickepin-Narrogin bushfire in February 2022.

Perth Magistrates Court heard the bushfire on 6 February 2022 started when Western Power’s high-voltage overhead electricity conductors clashed between two power poles in Wardering.

...

WA’s electrical safety regulator, Building and Energy, told the court its investigation found the distance between the power poles exceeded the prescribed limits. The separation between the conductors that clashed was also closer than the prescribed limits, causing a risk of arcing.

We all know the extraordinary damage and the dangerous situation that occurred from that Wickepin fire. There were 18 000 hectares burnt and thousands of livestock lost and homes were put in danger. It was very fortunate that no-one was killed. We know that that happened, but we also heard during the court case that in the following week, the same powerline clashed another two times on 11 February 2022. If the wind had changed and catastrophic circumstances arose again, it could have burnt 18 000 more hectares in the other direction. The reason for that is that those poles have been there for 50 years. They were twice as far apart as they should have been. We had plenty of reasons from Hon Darren West for all sorts of things that happen to the power network, but this happened and Western Power was fined. For 50 years it sat there and that fire was caused.

I want to get to some other brief details around communications. The same day that Wickepin–Narrogin was ablaze, Corrigin was having an extraordinary fire—it was probably worse, to be honest. Communications dropped out and there was an attempt to evacuate Corrigin as there was an attempt to evacuate Wickepin. The communications failed and the evacuation notice text message was not getting through to the people who required it. As I said, that fire was in early February 2022. Unbelievably, Corrigin had quite a nasty fire on 18 October last year on the other side of town. As members can imagine, the shire president said that everyone was fairly edgy about the first sign of smoke for that fire season and, sadly, similar situations occurred. Shire President Des Hickey explained that phone coverage in the town had died a few hours after the fire started, which significantly hampered the emergency response.

For having gone through what the people of Narrogin did and having raised attention to that issue at that time, not much has changed. Telstra and Western Power seem to point at each other and say, “It is not mine, it’s yours” and talk about putting generators on trailers and getting them to a tower in a hurry if there is a problem. Of course, roads get closed during fires. Generators cannot get to towers. Even if we put generators at a tower, they need to be turned on, and someone cannot get to the tower if the road is closed to turn them on. We continue to put those regional communities at risk in those sets of circumstances.

I will leave most of the rest of the debate to Hon Dr Steve Thomas, who I am sure is champing at the bit to respond to some of the technical issues raised by the government’s response. I have noticed that it is a power morning. In private members’ business, Hon Dan Caddy discussed big batteries and how that is solving the problem. I will just relay a quick story that most regional members will probably know. I also have a big battery on my property that keeps the lights on during the regular occurrences in which the power goes out. It is about that big and I put it in a yellow plastic torch when the power goes out. I turn it on and that gets me through the hours or whatever it takes. I make sure that I have a spare big battery just in case, which is what Kwinana and Collie are doing, because those big batteries do not last long in the torch. I was home on the farm on the weekend. At 10 o’clock on Saturday night,

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the power flicked out, which it regularly does. It is usually not for too long, but when I got up at six o'clock the next morning to jump into the shower and head back down to the Wagin Woolorama, there was still no power.

I have an instantaneous hot-water system. My options were to have a cold shower at 6.00 in the morning or to drive to another property on the farm that has a gas storage unit, so I took the drive. But the point is that Western Australians in regional parts of the state are very used to the power dropping out. It does often. Two years ago, Hon Darren West was giving people the advice that they should get a generator. Sadly, most people who live on regional properties own a generator and that is a very expensive thing to do; if they set it up next to the house and they also need to run the shearing shed that day, they probably need two generators or to move one between the two.

I congratulate Hon Colin de Grussa for moving this motion. There are serious issues, as we saw in Kalgoorlie recently. It was not only Kalgoorlie; I was getting phone calls every day from a gentleman in Narembeen whose power was out for seven, eight, nine days. The couple of hundred bucks he received was almost embarrassing. I will conclude my remarks and hand over to Hon Dr Steve Thomas.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [11.21 am]: Hon Steve Martin got the wrong Steve for a moment! I am very grateful to Hon Dr Steve Thomas for allowing me to speak next. I will take only a few minutes because I appreciate it is the opposition's time this morning. I acknowledge it is frustrating when the power goes out. That is undeniable. Particularly in regional Western Australia, power is very important for our telecommunications and entertainment systems.

As the Department of Fire and Emergency Services does from time to time, I take the opportunity to remind people in regional Australia that they should have a battery-powered AM/FM radio. Hon Darren West spoke about there being 860 000 power poles right throughout the state and, invariably, one, two or more will go out if someone crashes into them, there is a pole-top fire or whatever. It is really important at these times that people have a battery-operated radio in their house. I did a quick google this morning and amazon.com.au has them for as little as \$10. It is an important investment for people to make and I encourage all members to remind their constituents to have one of those radios available. It is not to say that it is always appropriate that the power goes out. Certainly, Western Power and the state government are making significant investment into updating our power system around the state.

Hon Martin Aldridge in his contribution referred to a letter that I got back from Telstra recently. I continually write to the federal government and indeed to Telstra, and I have done so since I took on this role in 2021. I raised it with Senator Bridget McKenzie when she was the minister. I have written to Telstra and the current feds, and I do so continually, because it is not appropriate that the telecommunication system goes out for as long as it does. In the correspondence that Hon Martin Aldridge referred to from Vicki Brady, the chief executive officer of Telstra, she spoke to the investment that Telstra, along with the commonwealth government and the state government, is making in our mobile network hardening program. I seek leave to table this document because I think it is important for everyone to see.

[Leave granted. See paper [3012](#).]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It gives an update on some of the investments Telstra is making. I think Telstra could be doing a lot more. Hon Colin de Grussa said the state could be doing more. We are not responsible for telecommunications, but we make an investment into black spot funding and a range of other things. I continue to raise this with the federal government because it is frustrating for our constituents. I acknowledge the members who contact me, particularly Jess Shaw, MLA, following those recent outages, and Hon Steve Martin; I have spoken to Hon Martin Aldridge at times too. It is important for us all to get the message out to our constituents when the power goes out. I ask people to do two things from today: get yourself a battery-powered AM/FM radio and, for those who have not done so, get yourself a bushfire plan, because we are seeing these things happen more frequently and they will continue as climate change becomes more of an issue.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [11.24 am]: I am pleased to be the third member of the Steve faction to contribute this morning! I am probably not going to leave room for the fourth.

Hon Stephen Pratt: Next motion.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: He will speak on the next motion.

I want to add a few bits. We could spend a bit of time on this, but I need to correct a few things said by the parliamentary secretary. If he wants to send his speech notes over to me in advance, I am happy to correct them. Electrons in power move almost instantaneously but not simultaneously. It is not at the speed of light. It is not 300 000 kilometres a second; it is probably a couple of thousand kilometres a second. It is not quite instantaneous. Another thing he said was that there are no small modular reactors in the world. There are plenty of small modular reactors in the world. There are no economically based small modular reactors in the world at this point. The first

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one is being constructed. I will be interested to see what its economic viability is. It is being built in Canada. I am happy to do corrections on his speech notes if he would like to flick them over before we start next time around.

I would like to mention the discussion on privatisation because it might surprise members to know that the Labor Party has engaged in some privatisation of the energy system as well. It sold off three wind farms. I think we retained 20 per cent ownership at the time, but the wind farms at Albany, Greenough River and Warradarge were sold off to Bright Energy under the first version of this government. Before members get overly excited about the privatisation process and throw rocks at the Liberal Party —

Hon Darren West: You're talking about generation. I'm talking about transmission.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is okay to privatise some bits but not other bits of the energy system. It is okay to privatise generation. We can privatise generation but we cannot privatise distribution. Oh, I see! Privatisation is okay; there are just some caveats on which bit of the energy system we are talking about! That is very interesting. The Liberal Party previously took a policy of selling 51 per cent of Western Power.

Hon Dan Caddy: You were a strong advocate for it.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Me personally? I was not even in the system at that point. I was not a member of Parliament. I think the prices that were expected were quite interesting. But the reality is that what has happened in the meantime, of course, is the government has an asset and for seven years a Labor government has run this asset down to a point at which it is fairly difficult to sell. The Liberal Party does not have a proposal going forward to sell the poles and wires of Western Power. That was a policy at a time, but as the Labor Party well knows, after each election the policy disappears.

Hon Darren West: It wasn't even your worst policy!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Let us not go down that path necessarily. But the reality is that the Labor Party has also happily engaged in privatisation. It depends on which bit it is.

One of the other things the parliamentary secretary said was that he had not heard anyone from this side thank the Western Power workers for their work, so I take the opportunity to thank the Western Power workers for all the work they do. They go out at ridiculous times of the night. People's power goes out and they do not like it, and the Western Power workers do an incredibly good and important job. Thank you for that. It also needs to be said that if the government did a better job of maintaining the system, the Western Power workers would not have to go out quite so often. The mere fact that we have had this run-down of assets and process makes it worse for the Western Power workers. As Hon Darren West quite rightly says, there was a time when government, for example, was doing maintenance to remove the dust and debris that accumulates at the top of poles because when we get some moisture it causes arcing across and starts pole-top fires. Maintenance used to be done on that in the metropolitan area. That is not done anymore. The government has stopped doing that and reduced the workload and the maintenance that is done. Guess what? When we get pole-top fires and the power goes out, we have to send out Western Power workers to try to fix that and make it safe. Perhaps the government needs to invest a bit more in the process.

The Kalgoorlie incident is important for one particular aspect. If there is a storm, the power will go out. That is just unfortunate. Two years earlier, we had a problem when the power went out and the backup system did not work. Two years later—this year—the power went out and the backup system did not work. Maintenance was even carried out on the backup system in the intervening year to try to improve it—the government invested in the backup system—and it still did not work. It was not fit for purpose. Of course, there was a massive issue. The failure is not that the backup system did not work but that the government knew it did not work and did not fix it. That is where the government needs to lift its game.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.