

ELECTRICITY — OUTAGES — REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Statement by Minister for Energy

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [12.04 pm]: I rise today to provide an update on Western Power's implementation of the recommendations in the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* report. As members will recall, a series of power outages occurred across Western Power's network from 24 to 28 December 2021. Immediately following the outages, I commissioned an independent review to be led by respected energy expert Michelle Shepherd. The review found that many of the outages were due to customer and network overloads driven by unusually high electricity demand in residential areas. This had emerged in the context of exceptional heatwave conditions and more Western Australians staying home for the festive season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I tabled the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* report on 23 March 2022, I announced that Western Power would implement all six recommendations.

I am pleased to report that this work is now substantially complete. A key achievement is Western Power's improved forecasting practices, which have been modernised to take account of higher levels of rooftop solar, and to draw on data from advanced metering infrastructure. This improved forecasting enables better network management during extreme hot weather. Western Power strengthened its network infrastructure, with upgrades to 70 distribution transformers and substations in Mandurah, Waikiki, Yanchep and Byford.

Another key recommendation was for Western Power to review its management of bushfire risk. Western Power worked with an expert independent consultant to review its management of bushfire risk. I thank the many stakeholders who collaborated with Western Power to support this work, including Energy Policy WA, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Western Australian Local Government Association.

Western Power used this review to implement a new and improved bushfire response. The new system draws on the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System to provide Western Power technicians with a more nuanced view of fire risk that comes with re-energising. Under this new regime, Western Power was able to restore power sooner following an outage, without endangering its crews and the community to the risk of bushfire. Western Power received positive feedback from customers and stakeholders on its improved communications. In particular, the community appreciated Western Power's enhanced SMS messaging and expanded website. The WA government also launched an extensive "Summer Readiness" advertising campaign to raise awareness on peak energy use over summer. Weather conditions were also far milder than the extreme heatwave conditions of Christmas 2021. As a result, customers experienced fewer network outages, fewer repeat outages and faster restoration times. Comparing 24 to 28 December 2022 to the same period in 2021, there was a 94 per cent decrease in fault call volumes to Western Power. Western Power continues to look at ways to deliver safe and reliable power to the community.

I commend Western Power for this work, which has materially improved power reliability for households and businesses. I now table Western Power's *Shepherd closeout report for Parliament*.

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