



Hon. Jim Chown MLC

Member for the Agricultural Region

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Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

Dear Chairman

Petition No. 111 – Kalbarri Power Supply

Thank you for your letter of 25 February 2016 inviting me to make a submission on the petition I sponsored regarding Kalbarri's power supply.

The issue of substandard electricity services in Kalbarri has been raised in Parliament over a number of years. Successive governments have struggled to provide adequate, reliable electricity services to this town at the extreme northern point of the south west interconnected electricity network.

Kalbarri is a town with some 1,300 permanent residents, although there can be upwards of 3,000 people in the town at any one time, and these numbers swell substantially to around 8,000 during the peak holiday season. Kalbarri is very much dependent upon tourism for its economy; according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2011 Census data, 15.3 per cent of those employed in Kalbarri are employed in the accommodation sector, followed by 6.7 per cent in the second highest employment sector of cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services, and the fifth highest employment sector in the town is supermarket and grocery stores at 2.9 per cent.

In the past two years, Kalbarri has experienced 77 power outages. However, this is not a new phenomenon; several Grievance Motions have been brought before Parliament with regard to Kalbarri's unreliable power supply over the past thirteen years. On 4 May 2004, a former Member for the Agricultural Region noted in a Parliamentary Question that at least \$80,000 worth of damage was caused to consumers during Kalbarri brownouts and blackouts. The ABC News reported on 29 June 2014, some ten years later, that Kalbarri had experienced ongoing power outages totalling more than 80 hours between January and March 2014.

On 25 March 2010 it was reported by the then Minister for Energy, in response to a Parliamentary Question, that between 1 December 2008 and 28 February 2010 Kalbarri experienced 74 outages lasting more than 1 minute. Unfortunately, many of these outages occur during summer, during the peak holiday season, and many of these outages last substantially longer than 1 minute. These power outages impact negatively upon Kalbarri's appeal as a tourist destination; a review of TripAdvisor, one of the World's largest travel sites, showed at least five negative reviews for accommodation in Kalbarri from intrastate and interstate visitors that related to electricity outages.

It is simply unconscionable that in 2016 Kalbarri should continue to experience such substandard electricity supply. Power outages in Kalbarri create a massive financial impost upon its residents. With extended outages, food in domestic and commercial fridges and freezers spoil and have to be discarded. A local supermarket owner, Wayne Forrest, claimed in an ABC News report on 19 March 2014 that he lost well over \$70,000 due to power outages in the early part of 2014.

The fourth highest employment sector in Kalbarri is commercial fishing and the industry requires chillers and freezers to keep the seafood caught fresh and saleable. There have been reports of compressors in fridges and freezers being damaged after power is restored due to burnout from the power load. There have also been reports of damage being caused to appliances, computer equipment, etc. due to power surges. As I understand it, based on discussions with Kalbarri residents, power outages adversely affect the town's sewerage pumping system and also impacts upon emergency alert systems.

While I am encouraged by the Minister for Energy's recent announcement that Western Power will contribute \$300,000 towards a feasibility study to develop an electricity microgrid in Kalbarri, the feasibility study itself is expected to take six months. Further to the study, there is no timeline to actually implement the preferred microgrid option for the town. Once the feasibility study is completed, the Government should ensure that a viable solution is implemented in Kalbarri as soon as possible. In the interim, it would seem that Western Power should ensure it has appropriate maintenance programs in place to deal with the electricity supply issues in Kalbarri.

Numerous times over the years Western Power has cited weather conditions causing arcing as the reason for power outages and/or pole top fires. With regard to the power outages totalling more than 80 hours between January and March 2014, Western Power denied claims for compensation claiming that the outages were due to "unusual weather conditions in the Kalbarri Region". Arcing can occur when there is contamination, such as salt and dust, on insulators that combines with high humidity; arcing can also cause pole top fires.

To combat arcing occurring, Western Power cleans and coats insulators with silicon. However, despite acknowledging contamination on the lines as a problem, Western Power's maintenance schedule on the single-feeder line servicing Kalbarri does not appear to effectively address the problem. Perhaps Western Power needs to rethink the frequency of their maintenance schedule on these lines, particularly silicone coating of insulators, to alleviate the occurrence of power outages.

I believe the issue of the continuity and reliability of electricity supply in Kalbarri requires further consideration by the Committee. I look forward to learning the results of the Committee's deliberations in due course.

Yours sincerely



Hon Jim Chown MLC
MEMBER FOR AGRICULTURAL REGION
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport

24 March 2016