



Dr Janet Woollard MLA

Member for Alfred Cove

Media Release

UNDERGROUND POWER FUNDING MUST BE INCREASED

6 August 2008

Independent Liberal Member for Alfred Cove Dr Janet Woollard called on both major parties to commit to setting a completion date for the Underground Power Program (UPP) and to increase funding so that older, established homes throughout the metropolitan area can have access to the benefits of underground power.

"Currently, parts of Mount Pleasant are having underground power put in but many residents have contacted me to point out the enormous costs they are facing through additional charges on their rates," said Dr Woollard.

"With the cost of materials and contractor expenses growing daily, whoever forms the next Government will need to increase the amount of funds that are made available for the Underground Power Program so that ratepayers don't face even larger bills in the future."

Dr Woollard said the costs for underground power, which is far more reliable, requires less maintenance and is far safer in severe weather conditions, is split with Western Power paying 25%, the Office of Energy paying 25% and local councils passing on the remaining 50% to their ratepayers.

"The City of Melville adopted the Gross Rental Value method when other councils like Fremantle and South Perth use a fixed rate method incorporating a sliding scale for single residences down to multiple residential units, which appears to be a much fairer way of spreading the charges," said Dr Woollard.

"Fremantle also offers a six-year repayment term for its ratepayers while South Perth offers three or five year terms. The City of Melville has a three year term available but it hasn't advertised it and ratepayers have to ring council to ask for this."

"I know the City of Melville is concerned about its \$21,220,000 million high-risk investment that is in jeopardy but ratepayers should not have to suffer the brunt of that poor financial decision. I have written to the City of Melville suggesting the underground repayment option should be advertised and offered to all constituents".

Dr Woollard said there are still around 390,000 overhead connections in the metropolitan area alone that should be converted to underground power.

"The cost to do that is likely to be around \$3.2 billion based on today's prices and at least another \$2 billion would be required to provide underground power to about 170,000 overhead connections outside the metropolitan area," said Dr Woollard.

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"Since the UPP pilot program started in 1996, only around 50,000 older established lots have been converted to underground power, leaving a huge number of homes still waiting for access."

Major residential projects and localised enhancement projects:

1996-1999	Pilot Project	6,482 lots in 4 local government areas	Cost \$24 million
1998-2001	Round One	7,283 lots in 13 local government areas	Cost \$53.778 million
2001-2004	Round Two	15,463 lots in 22 local government areas	Cost \$67.575 million
2004-2007	Round Three	11,838 lots in 16 local government areas	Cost \$99.707 million
2007-2010	Round Four	8,200 lots in 7 local government areas	Cost \$60 million+

Dr Woollard said according to the Office of Energy website, the aim of the Underground Power Program is to improve the standard of electricity supply to consumers by addressing the reliability issues with existing overhead power lines.

"I am concerned that Western Power and the Office of Energy may be passing on required infrastructure upgrades to the community in the guise of underground power projects," said Dr Woollard.

"The Office of Energy's website says council's applications for the UPP are assessed by using a three-year rolling average of the System Average Interruption Duration Index and are ranked against power quality, network growth requirements and network characteristics to give an indication of current and future network performance."

"While 89 proposals from 21 councils were received in the last UPP round, only seven could be accepted because of the Government's limited funding."

"If those areas were identified as needing infrastructure upgrades, they should have been fully funded by Western Power through its charter responsibility to provide a safe, reliable and quality electricity supply to the community rather than ratepayers who are already suffering under the weight of high State Government charges."

"It has taken nearly 12 years to do 50,000 older established homes so far. How many more years will it take and what will the cost be to provide underground power to the remaining 390,000 homes yet to be done?"

"All households should have access to the benefits of underground power and the new State Government will need to provide significantly increased resources to meet the community's expectations."