



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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POWER POLES; ELECTRICAL CABLING

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.17 p.m.): I rise today to speak about the issue of power poles, which are controlled by Energex, and electrical cabling generally. This is a very important matter, and I call on the relevant authorities to address a very substantial issue for our society in the future, that is, the undergrounding of electrical power cables.

Mr Purcell: Hear, hear! Well said.

Mr FENLON: I thank the member for Bulimba for his interjection. I know that the member is known as a very long-term advocate of this very important cause. I would certainly appreciate his support for this issue in the future. Recently, the member for Bulimba and I were discussing some of the great philosophers, and we remarked on the work of Kant and his critique of aesthetic judgment. The member for Bulimba remarked that Kant probably could have written that great philosophical work in the 1990s, because he might have been inspired by the aesthetic deterioration of this society in thinking about that work. I thank the member for his interest.

This particular issue has had a very substantial history in my electorate as local constituents have become very concerned about the poor maintenance of power poles and very badly deteriorated power poles that are infested with white ants, etc. I alerted local media to this. Ironically, within a couple of weeks of that, a power pole at Logan Road, Buranda fell onto a truck. That incident occurred as a direct result of white ant infestation in that power pole. Thankfully, nobody was hurt on that occasion, but it certainly shows that very dangerous events can occur and that some rectification is required in the future.

There is certainly a very high prevalence of white ants throughout suburbs within my electorate. Indeed the power poles are nearing the end of their replacement cycle as many of them were installed in the 1940s and 1950s. A further aspect of this issue is the advent of the Foxtel and Optus cables, which have added to the aesthetic eyesore.

Mr Purcell: And the burden to the poles.

Mr FENLON: Indeed, it has added to the burden on the poles, as the member for Bulimba points out.

The decision to create double cabling on our power pole system was very stupid. It has compounded the problem that already existed. The community has a considerable interest in this issue, which has upset local residents. I have had to deal with cases in which Foxtel and Optus have been very inconsiderate by stringing their cables directly over private property without the consent of citizens. Some elderly citizens have become particularly upset about that. In some instances I have been successful in having those cables removed. As the new cables are strung much lower, they pose further dangers to vehicles with high loads.

There is a wider issue of safety in that the existing power poles need to be maintained. Depending on the integrity of the system and the general state of maintenance of the system in any particular area, there is a level of susceptibility to storm damage. That can be increased if an area is at a low level of maintenance. In fact, a very significant tragedy occurred recently at Booval. That is the subject of a coroner's inquiry at the moment. I will not canvass the merits of that case. I will be watching the outcome of that coroner's inquiry very closely. I hope that the relevant authorities are also watching

very closely the outcome of that coroner's inquiry in terms of those three very unfortunate citizens who were killed when power lines dropped during a storm.

I am very grateful to the Minister for Mines and Energy, who is present in the Chamber. He took the trouble to visit the electorate of Greenslopes recently. He saw at first hand the prevalence of white ants in local power poles. He saw that it is a very significant problem.

In short, power poles and power lines are a blight on a civilised society. They must be eradicated. At this point in our history, we must have the vision to look ahead to the next millennium and say, "No, these power poles, these eyesores, will no longer be tolerated in our society; we want to move forward." This has already been recognised in terms of building community environments that instil community pride and encourage community-minded behaviour. I refer to the trial project agreed to by the Energex board in the Brisbane suburb of Inala. In conjunction with urban renewal work, significant contributions towards the costs by a number of external agencies, that is, agencies other than Energex, have made that particular project possible. We have already seen that such urban renewal projects show real results by reducing crime and improving the self-esteem of those communities. We should take that progress forward to all our communities. We need real vision about what our communities must be like in the next millennium. We can say that it is unsatisfactory that they remain as they are with those unsightly, unsafe power lines strung across properties and streets. We have to deal with it.

Energex should be congratulated for the progress it has made in new suburban estates, where power is articulated through an underground network. That is done at significant developer cost. The network in agreed areas of scenic or similar significance is underground. That is done at 50% Energex cost. The network is underground where major roads are being realigned. That is done at 33% Energex cost. That is a start, but we have to move on. As a civilised society, we have to re-evaluate the cost. In doing so, we must add the hard economic costs to the social costs. Those costs are often hard to quantify directly; however, we still have to weigh them up and include them in the calculation of how we progress with this matter. Energex has been looking at this issue for some years. As far back as 1993, it carried out a desk top study in a sample area. It assessed the costs and benefits associated with undergrounding to Energex and its customers. The selected area was a portion of Brisbane that happens to fall within the Greenslopes electorate. Energex showed great intelligence in selecting that area at the time because of two factors. Firstly, that area of Brisbane might be described as white ant city. White ants love that area, because of the soil's quality and moisture content. Secondly, we are reaching the end of the replacement cycle for those power poles. As I said, they were mostly installed as far back as the 1940s and 1950s.

The other parties to be included in today's context are Optus, Telstra, the BCC, the Federal Government and the State Government. Although I appreciate that, under the current legislation, the Minister has limitations in directing Energex to undertake certain actions, I believe that all agencies, Governments and the Minister are able to review the current legislation with a view to directing Energex to those very worthwhile ends. Today we must bring all authorities together with a view to improving those facilities, reducing the level of cabling overhead and to having cabling underground. Such an exercise has very important consequences in terms of employment generation. If we cannot improve our employment generation in that way, there is something wrong.

Time expired.
