



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (3.46 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Electricity Amendment Bill 2000. The performance of the regional electricity councils has been yet another of the success stories resulting from the recent changes made to the structure of the electricity industry in Queensland. The seven regional electricity councils were established in September 1999. There is one for the south-east portion of Queensland and six for the rest of Queensland. The charter of the council is to—

"Enhance the reliability and quality of electricity supply throughout Queensland by identifying the needs, requirements and expectations of electricity consumers, and provide constructive advice and feedback on these issues to the Minister, the Consumer Protection Office and Government owned electricity distribution and retail corporations."

The councils have a set charter, which includes that they consider a range of specific issues such as changes to the local electricity network, vegetation management, the impact on local communities of electricity works and a number of others.

Issues that have been drawn to the attention of the south-east Queensland electricity council and a number of the others include the reliability of supply in various locations throughout Queensland, wildlife contact with overhead lines, vegetation management issues, customer service standards and performance. Those four issues affect the people who live in the Samford Valley, Mount Nebo and Mount Glorious area within my electorate.

I want to draw to the attention of the House an issue that recently arose relating to the electricity network in the Samford Valley, which is in my electorate. This issue arises from the conversion of rural blocks into subdivided residential estates. It is important to bear in mind that, historically, Samford Valley was largely an agricultural community involved in timber getting, banana plantations and principally dairying. At the time, the area had a small population. The railway line from Ferry Grove to Dayboro was the access point for a lot of rural produce and timber coming into the city.

The road network was the typical random rural road network that we find in regional and rural Queensland, with roads following a meandering course between the various rural farm blocks. In the past 10 to 15 years, residential blocks have increased in number, and there is a large number of acreage blocks. Significantly, there has been a number of large estate developments also. The Pine Rivers Shire Council has attempted to balance the residential development and other development in the valley against maintaining the village and rural lifestyle of the community. That is the backdrop.

The electricity network that was put in place to satisfy the demands of the rural/agricultural community grew up in a higgledy-piggledy and irregular fashion to provide powerlines and electricity supplies across the valley. As residential development has taken place, Energex has quite rightly sought to rationalise the reticulation network in the valley. As with any land developments, the Pine Rivers Shire Council requires a certificate of electricity supply to be lodged with the council by the developer before the council will grant approval for a development application and any relevant rezoning application. The developer, whether it be the local owner of a rural block or a commercial developer engaged by a landowner, then approaches Energex to obtain a certificate of electricity supply. The Pine Rivers Shire Council then grants the development application or the subdivision application.

Generally, before Energex will grant a certificate of electricity supply it will require the developer to provide in the plan of subdivision for electricity to be supplied to all the new subdivided blocks from a new powerline connecting to the powerlines on the principal road giving access to the subdivision. This is a sensible approach for trying to rationalise the old reticulation network as and when new estates are developed.

Over time, fewer and fewer properties draw their electricity from the old powerlines. If the developer wishes to remove old powerlines that after the subdivision provide no power to the subdivided blocks, it must pay for the relocation of the old powerlines onto an adjacent rural block and off the subdivided land with the consent of the adjacent landowner. However, the adjacent rural block, which is often a large block, may be subdivided by its owner within a few short years. If this happens, the same approach will be applied by the Pine Rivers Shire Council and Energex as described earlier. If the developer does not relocate the old powerline off the new subdivision, Energex will require a wide easement over the subdivided land to give access for inspection and maintenance purposes. The result of this is that over time parts of the old powerline are relocated in a piecemeal fashion.

Secondly, developer after developer pays Energex for each successive relocation of parts of the old powerline. Thirdly, fewer and fewer people are drawing power from the old powerline. Fourthly, more and more people are drawing power from the new powerline. Fifthly, the cost of each development is inflated by the extra cost of each relocation of parts of the old powerline. If the old powerline is not relocated, its presence on the new subdivided blocks reduces the value of those blocks. If the old line is not relocated, the easement required by Energex is a significant encumbrance on the title. In one instance the recovery of two poles and one transformer from one subdivided block and the erection of one new pole on an adjacent property will cost approximately \$11,000, with the cost to be borne by the developer.

I commend Energex for the recent discussions with me and several constituents living in the Samford Valley who have brought this problem to light. Energex has shown an extraordinary willingness to address this issue. It appears to me that Energex, in close collaboration with the Pine Rivers Shire Council, must develop a long-term integrated plan for the electricity distribution network in the Samford Valley. The development in the valley is likely to continue and increase. The anomalous situation to which I have drawn attention today and which has arisen through no-one's fault and no-one's poor intention will occur again and again.

I understand that Energex is totally committed to maintaining electricity supplies to all landowners who continue to draw their power from the old powerline network. However, it is clear that a more rational and less costly way of introducing a new reticulation network in this locality must be found. I am pleased to say that Energex is looking at this problem and I look forward to its response. I commend the Bill to the House.
