



Speech by

**Mr TIM MULHERIN**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Hansard 4 October 2000

### **ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (3.03 p.m.): Following the reorganisation of the Queensland electricity industry, seven regional electricity councils have been established by the Minister for Mines and Energy. These councils provide advice to the Minister, to electricity entities and to the Department of Mines and Energy on electricity issues particular to a region, with the aim of improving the reliability and quality of the State's electricity supply. Whilst the Electricity Act 1994 provides that advisory committees for the administration of the Act may be established under the regulations or by the Minister, the legislation before the House expressly authorises the establishment of committees such as the regional electricity councils.

The seven regional electricity councils were established in the following areas along the same boundaries as the previous electricity distributors: south-east Queensland, south-west Queensland, Capricornia, Wide Bay/Burnett, north Queensland, far-north Queensland and Mackay. Whilst on the subject of Mackay, I congratulate the work of the local committee under the stewardship of its chair, Mr Anthony Ross, for the work it does in raising issues with Ergon and the Minister.

The role of the councils is to enhance the reliability and quality of electricity supply throughout Queensland by identifying the needs, requirements and expectations of electricity consumers and providing constructive advice and feedback on these issues to the Minister, the Consumer Protection Office and Government owned electricity distribution and retail corporations. The regional electricity councils provide a forum for community involvement in the operations of the regional electricity network, including proposed changes to the local network and improvements in the way Government owned electricity distribution and retail corporations operate within the region. Specific issues that the regional electricity councils may consider include proposed changes to the local network, environmental issues and vegetation management, major infrastructure projects, impacts on local communities, reliability of supply and network maintenance.

Since their establishment in late 1999, the regional electricity councils have provided a forum for community involvement in the operation of the regional electricity network, including proposed changes to the local network and improvements in the way Government owned electricity distribution and retail corporations operate within the region. The councils meet approximately four times per year. Because they are based in rural and metropolitan areas throughout Queensland, they have already proven to be an effective means of ensuring that all community members have a voice in informing and conveying feedback regarding the performance of the electricity industry to the Minister for Mines and Energy, the Department of Mines and Energy and, importantly, directly to the electricity entities.

Ergon and Energex are providing the funding of council members for daily meeting fees and any necessary and reasonable expenses incurred by members whilst travelling to meetings. These fees are in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations titled Procedures for the Remuneration of Part-Time Chairs and Members of Government Boards, Committees and Statutory Authorities. To ensure that fresh ideas are presented at council meetings, it is intended that regional electricity council members be appointed for an initial two-year period, with approximately half of the members to then retire at the end of each year and allow other suitable and interested community members to be involved.

The regional electricity councils have been very successful in raising and discussing issues with their regional Ergon or Energex representatives. In addition, they have reported to the Minister for

Mines and Energy on a number of issues which vary in terms of significance but are truly representative of the concerns of electricity consumers throughout the State. Some of the issues brought to the attention of the Minister include adequacy of streetlight patrols, safety programs, pole inspections, the South-East Queensland 2000 Project, comments on the draft negotiated customer sale contracts, comments on the Remote Area Power Scheme, network performance report considerations, the impact of call centres on customer service and reliability of supply in regional areas.

The regional electricity councils are already proving their effectiveness in communicating and advocating the issues which are of importance to electricity consumers in regional, rural and metropolitan locations throughout the State and will continue to provide a valuable forum to inform the Minister for Mines and Energy of issues within the energy sector. I congratulate the Minister on establishing these councils, because following the reorganisation of the industry there was concern that we would lose our local voice. I think that these councils provide local communities with the opportunity to raise any number of concerns they may have.

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