



Speech by

**Mr JIM PEARCE**

**MEMBER FOR FITZROY**

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Hansard 17 May 2001

**ERGON ENERGY; MR J. SONTER**

**Mr PEARCE** (Fitzroy—ALP) (10.27 a.m.): I bring to the attention of the House the heartless actions of electricity supplier Ergon Energy in pursuing an unemployed Gracemere youth in the recovery of \$1,430 for the immediate cost of repairs to a power pole following a motor vehicle accident. Jeremy Sonter was the driver of a vehicle that smacked into a power pole at the Kerrigan and Feez Streets roundabout in North Rockhampton on 27 September last year. There were contributing factors to the accident, including problems with the street drainage design, but nothing that supports Ergon Energy's tough stand on pursuing Mr Sonter.

Rockhampton police did not rate the accident as one that should be followed up with charges under the Traffic Act. I assure honourable members that if there had been charges for breaches of the Traffic Act, I would not be speaking on Mr Sonter's behalf. The incident is regrettable, but it was an accident. There was no premeditated intent to knock down the power pole and there should be no requirement for Mr Sonter to be pursued by Ergon Energy. Mr Sonter is unemployed, has no savings and is unable to pay the bill.

An article in the *Morning Bulletin* dated 24 April said that Mr Sonter was uninsured. I am advised that this is not true. In the same article Ergon Energy operations manager, Neil Lowry, said that Ergon Energy was willing to negotiate but had not been contacted by Mr Sonter. In a letter dated 6 April 2001, in response to my representations on behalf of Mr Sonter, Mr Lowry suggested that Mr Sonter should lodge a claim through his insurance company and seek benefit from them for the third-party damage. In that letter, Mr Lowry made no offer for negotiation.

Mr Lowry would be aware of the time factor involved with the processing of such claims and it is unreasonable and unfair to demand that Mr Sonter pay \$1,430 for the immediate cost following the accident. Ergon Energy is using bullyboy tactics on a young man who is unable to pay the bill or fight the system. I again call on Ergon Energy to show some compassion and understanding and give this young bloke a break.

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