



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

Hansard Tuesday, 17 August 2004

---

## **ELECTRICITY SUPPLY**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.32 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. Firstly, I acknowledge the long hard hours put in by the dedicated Ergon Energy employees, many of whom I have had the great pleasure of dealing with since being elected as the member for Charters Towers.

The Charters Towers electorate has had minor and major energy problems over the past few years. Personally, I have been extremely impressed by the ability of the staff of Ergon to deal with the problems to the best of their ability and with the limited resources available to them. The problems with the electricity supply in the electorate of Charters Towers relate to remoteness and the government's lack of interest in providing a quality essential service to the people of these communities.

One example would be people in those communities who require respirator type equipment for medical conditions. Along with day-to-day concerns about their health, those people have to ensure that, should the electricity drop out, they have enough fuel on hand to run the generators that they have purchased to ensure that they continue to have a satisfactory quality of life until their electricity supply is turned on.

Many times shopkeepers have had to throw out stock that has been thawed due to power outages. This involves the shopkeeper having to recover money for the damaged goods. Those people receive a service that is a lower standard than they pay for. Business owners, people with medical conditions and other residents in the rural areas of the Charters Towers electorate have had to be prepared for lengthy power outages for many years now. Now that the government has robbed Energex and delayed the upgrade of the Queensland electricity network, the people of the south-east corner have to tolerate substandard electricity supplies. Let us hope that they have the same ability to adapt as those in the bush.

Many people in my electorate pay a guarantee over a period. In other words, they come to an agreement that they will use \$1,000 worth of power per three months over a 10-year period. If they do not use the power, even if they use only \$500 worth, they still have to pay \$1,000. That is the guarantee. Unfortunately, although people pay the guarantee they cannot be guaranteed the power because quite often the power is out, and then comes the damage that the blackouts cause to machinery, fridges, freezers, computers—the list goes on.

Towns in my electorate, such as Alpha, have a major difficulty with the power supply. The blackouts are constant. Residents maintain that they can set their clocks to them. The blackouts peak at Christmas time and during extremes in temperature. In the recent cold spate, Alpha residents had blackouts of up to 12 hours for three nights in a row. Their main power supply is in Barcaldine so, unless the cause of the outage is located quickly, residents wait for hours for the power to come back on. Businesses in those areas have been severely affected. Often they have no option but to close their shops, which angers locals.

There are other towns that I would like to mention that recently had power problems and, if this debate had not been brought on by surprise, with a little research I would have been able to name the 32 towns in my electorate. Within the last couple of months the residents of Greenvale have suffered an

outage due to a fault in an underground cable. Generators had to be provided for affected customers. Ravenswood had problems with the 66kV line feeder. At Aramac I have been advised that areas have been subjected to momentary outage.

The energy crisis will not and cannot be resolved while the state government continues to insist that Ergon and Energex hand over profits to the government. The state government puts the blame for the electricity crisis at the feet of the Queensland power corporations. I cannot see how the government can blame anyone else while it robs the corporations and gives back a few crumbs to upgrade Queensland's entire electricity network. It is time that the government started being responsible, stopped robbing the corporations and ploughed back the funds into urgent upgrades and maintenance of the Queensland electricity network. I support the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition.