

Question on Notice

No. 520

Asked on Wednesday 20 April 2005

MRS E CUNNINGHAM asked the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (MR BARTON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to his email to various Ergon Energy staff on 1 April 2005 regarding their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement which proposes an EDSD allowance of up to \$13,000 for technical stream employees including cleaners, storemen, system designers and truck drivers—

(1) Will he provide evidence of these latter skills being in 'very short supply' (refer to comments by Bill Nagle denying any particular shortage – The Courier Mail, 3 February 2005)?

(2) Will he outline the 'substantial changes in work practices' referred to which were the offsets for the EDSD allowance for technical stream but did not apply to administrative stream employees?

ANSWER:

The proposed Ergon Energy Certified Agreement 2005 is currently before a Full Bench of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for certification. The Full Bench comprises the President, Vice President and a Commissioner. Dates for the hearing have not yet been determined.

The information sought by the Member for Gladstone encompasses an important component of the Government's arguments in support of the proposed agreement during the certification hearing. As the matter is yet to be argued before the Commission, it would be inappropriate for me to inform the Parliament of the information sought. Providing this information would subjugate the Commissions process.

The comments by Mr Nagle quoted in the Courier Mail on 3 February 2005 are as follows:

"The situation varies across all the states, so it's pretty hard to say whether or not there's a uniform picture," Mr Nagle said. "There is a tight labour market in most of the skills areas, and the electricity industry is no different. But there's no employment crisis going on."

This suggests that Mr Nagle does in fact acknowledge that Australia, including the electricity industry, is being affected by skills shortages.

The Australian Services Union has indicated its intention to oppose the certification of the proposed Ergon Energy Certified Agreement 2005 on the grounds that the agreement does not meet the requirements of the Industrial Relations Act 1999. That union has the opportunity to put its arguments to the Commission during the certification proceedings.