

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 1554

asked on Thursday, 30 November 2006

MR CRIPPS ASKED THE MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY (MR WILSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the proposed Tully – Innisfail transmission line to be constructed by Powerlink between these two localities—

- (1) How does he justify the claim that transmission towers located closer to the coast will enhance the security of supply when the towers will be rated to withstand wind speeds of up to 220 kph, whereas wind speeds associated with Cyclone Larry were recorded at up to 300 kph and the fact that cyclones abate as they move inland?
- (2) Is he concerned about advice given to the Johnstone Shire Council in January 2005 by the former minister that the structural steelwork on the existing Kareeya – Innisfail transmission line had deteriorated to the point that the towers were at increasing risk of failure, 14 months before Cyclone Larry and whether any investigation has been conducted to ascertain if a lack of maintenance to these towers was the reason which caused the towers to fail when Cyclone Larry occurred?

ANSWER:

- (1) Powerlink has advised me that Cyclone Larry highlighted the significant disadvantages of having high voltage powerlines inland in the rainforest, where access is extremely difficult, and the major advantages of having accessible powerlines on the coastal plain. Due to difficulties in gaining access, Powerlink was only able to complete a full assessment of the damage to the existing inland Kareeya to Innisfail transmission line more than three months after the cyclone. In comparison, Powerlink was able to restore electricity supply on the Edmonton to Innisfail transmission line, located along the coastal plain, four days after the cyclone.

The new Tully to Innisfail transmission line will be built to appropriate cyclone design standards, and it is expected to be able to withstand winds such as those generated by Cyclone Larry without suffering severe structural damage. Also, the location of the new line on the coastal plain will help ensure any damage that may result from a future cyclone, such as from flying debris, can be quickly identified and repaired.

- (2) Powerlink has advised me that the Kareeya to Innisfail transmission line is more than 50 years old and Powerlink identified several years ago that it needed to be

replaced by around 2006 to ensure a reliable supply of electricity is maintained to Far North Queensland. Powerlink has been working towards the identification of a suitable route for a replacement line for several years and received Commonwealth approval to construct the replacement line between Tully and Innisfail in mid 2006.

Powerlink advises that any suggestion that a lack of maintenance contributed to the failure of four towers on the aged Kareeya to Innisfail transmission line during Cyclone Larry is incorrect. Over the past five years, Powerlink has implemented an intensive maintenance program for the Kareeya to Innisfail line to help ensure its reliability until such time as the replacement line is commissioned. The annual maintenance costs for the Kareeya to Innisfail transmission line were approximately \$2,600 per kilometre, which is nearly twice as much as the average amount spent on maintaining other transmission lines in the State. Investigations into damage sustained by the Kareeya to Innisfail line during Cyclone Larry identified that the four towers failed due to cyclonic wind forces and not due to maintenance matters.