

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Agriculture and Related Industries
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into bushfires in Australia

Having been the Federal Member for the Seat of Pearce, an electorate of approximately 26,251 square kilometres, I have seen the destructive power of bushfires and the emotional impact on people in the aftermath.

The most recent fire in December 2009 injured one person with burns to ten per cent of her body, placed the lives of fire-fighters, shire rangers and emergency services workers at risk, burnt through 3,000 hectares of land, burnt down 38 homes and damaged several others. The fire destroyed and damaged sheds, fencing, machinery, crops, orchards, vineyards, dairies and olive groves. It killed farm animals, native fauna, birds and family pets. The fire destroyed or disrupted the business interests of many people in the community and for those who lost their homes and personal possessions the event has caused terrible trauma and a long period of disruption and rebuilding.

A Report on this most recent fire titled ***Bushfire near River and Folewood Roads, Toodyay Western Australia 29 December 2009*** was completed by Energy Safety (a Western Australian State Government Agency) and released on Friday 18th February 2010. It could not find any definitive evidence that a fault in the power reticulation system caused this fire, but a careful reading of the Report will show that the enquiry was inconclusive and the people of Toodyay continue to live with the uncertainty. Please see **Annexure A** for full report.

In the Introduction and Summary of the Report Energy Safety made the following comments:

“The Fire and Emergency Service Authority (FESA) notified Energy Safety on 29th September 2009 that the bushfire (FESA incident number 141266) originated in the vicinity of Western Power’s T303 spur overhead single-phase high voltage 12.7 kV power line.

“Energy Safety has been unable to determine if electricity from Western Power’s distribution system caused the bushfire on 29 December 2009.”

In the conclusion the Report said: *“There is clear evidence of arcing between the conductors in the span between poles T303-42 and T303.43. The reason for and timing of the arcing or whether this caused the ignition of the fire could not be determined.”*

Toodyay was also the site of a fire in 2007 that tragically took the life of one person (young local school teacher Ms Michelle Mack). The fire burnt through several farms in the district.

Since that time, I have brought to the attention of both State and Federal Government the risk that ageing power reticulation systems pose to many areas in the Pearce electorate and beyond.

The ageing power reticulation system in Western Australia appears to have been the cause of many fires. Fires which have caused loss of life, injury, destruction of the built infrastructure, damage to the natural environment and ecology, loss of livestock, damage to businesses and traumatised residents. Please see **Annexure B** for a press report from *The West Australian* newspaper of 23rd February 2009 (“Powerlines started \$10 million fire”, by Georgina Loney).

One of the problems has been wood poles. As far back as 2005 concerns about the safety of wood poles physically failing in Western Power’s networks led to EnergySafety undertaking an assessment to examine whether the power generator’s management system complied with *Electricity (Supply Standards and Systems Safety) Regulations 2001*. That assessment was concluded in 2006 and the Audit Report was issued to Western Power in November of that year.

The State of wood power poles is well articulated by the *2008 Distribution Wood Pole Audit Review*, which highlights the age of many of the poles:

“Untreated jarrah poles were installed in the SEC’s and SECWA’s (now Western Power’s) distribution network from the late 1940s until the late 1970s. The youngest of these untreated jarrah poles are 29 years old and the oldest are approximately 60 years old. The Australian Standard for wood poles (AS 2209) quotes the service life of untreated wood poles in ground to be 15 to 25 years, and above ground 40 years.

“Many of these untreated and un-reinforced jarrah poles are well beyond their prudent service life of 25 years. Any reinforced, but untreated, jarrah poles older than 40 years are also beyond their prudent service life.” – (page 62)

EnergySafety monitored Western Power’s progress on the issues identified in the 2006 Audit Report. The office resolved to follow up with a Report in 2008 and to make the Report a public document.

In summary, the *2008 Distribution Wood Pole Audit Review*, completed in May 2009 by the Office of Energy Safety, highlights deficiencies within Western Power’s Distribution Wood Pole Management Systems. Please see **Annexure C** for full report.

The report identifies a number of critical safety issues that have not progressed satisfactorily since the 2006 Audit and which need specific attention to achieve acceptable wood pole safety performance. These include:

1. Wood pole inspection practices including their application in the field.
2. The “good wood” serviceability criteria should be replaced.
3. Procurement processes quote technical and performance requirements, but lack adequate audits of the supply chain and inspection of the components supplied.
4. Pole replacement plans at levels that are sufficient to deliver acceptable wood pole safety across the entire population of some 630,000 wood poles.
5. Overview and continuous improvement of the wood pole management from design through to network performance.

In view of the obvious threat outlined in the Audit by the Energy Safety regulator in Western Australia, it is disappointing that it is not given a priority in the national infrastructure development program in partnership with the states, because this audit clearly outlines the risks of doing nothing or doing too little to redress the deficiencies.

The risk of fires due to ageing power reticulation infrastructure is a risk that can be almost entirely eliminated by a commitment of capital to update the system.

It will require political will at both a State and Federal level for this urgent work to go ahead, but there is little doubt that putting the lives of fire-fighters and citizens at risk, due to failure to renew the system is unacceptable. The financial cost of such fires is another issue and the Government should consider a Productivity Report into the cost of bushfires with particular attention to links between ageing power reticulation systems and fire risk.

The challenges of rectifying ageing power infrastructure are not insurmountable but complications arise due to a confluence of factors.

Apart from power generation falling within the purview of the State Government, restraints to a solution were articulated by the journalist Georgina Loney in the article “Powerlines started \$10million fire” (please see **Annexure B**). Comments by Western Power’s customer services general manager Mark de Laeter illustrate how this can create a poor culture of maintenance.

“Whilst we’d like to fix everything straight away, it’s just not possible, we prioritise according to risk,” Mr de Laeter said. “That’s the challenging task, we’ve got a limited amount of funding and a limited amount of people that funding will pay for.”

Mr de Laeter went on to say that money needed to be allocated for conductor clashing issues, pole-top insulation and managing vegetation.

It is evident that power utilities once wholly Government owned and controlled have in most cases become corporate or privatised entities and, over the years, insufficient capital has been set aside to manage an infrastructure replacement program that minimises the risk of fires from this source and indeed power outages.

In addition, the political issue of the cost of energy to industry and domestic consumers means that power charging policies bear no resemblance to the real cost of delivery and therefore inhibit the capacity for generators to make adequate provision for a sinking fund out of general revenue.

On August 13 2009 in response to my earlier correspondence to the Prime Minister regarding the risk of ageing power reticulation systems, The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, Minister for Resources and Energy, Minister for Tourism responded in part:

“...In terms of a cooperative national approach to this issue, while the Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE) is not specifically focussed on pole infrastructure, it is promoting a range of initiatives to address consistency in the technical and safety aspects of regulation. Its Energy Technical and Safety Leaders Group, which includes industry, regulators and union representatives, will develop an implementation plan for the harmonisation of energy technical and safety regulation by the end of this year (2009). This reform is in addition to the work on extreme weather events and economic measures outlined in my previous letter.”

Please see **Annexure D** for full correspondence from the Minister.

Although the energy network infrastructure falls within the responsibility of the States and Territories, it could be argued that given the scope and the risks posed by the problem the Australian Government has a role in supporting the States to make the necessary upgrades.

While acknowledging the difficulties confronting the State Governments and the power generators, the continuation of these practices is patently unacceptable and the re-instatement of the matter on the COAG agenda should be an urgent priority.

Following the devastating Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and recognising the bushfire prone nature of much of the Pearce electorate, I again raised the issue of the ageing power reticulation systems and other matters of fire safety in Pearce with Federal, State, Local Government and volunteer bushfire brigades as follows:

- 23 Feb 2009 – Wrote to Prime Minister Hon Kevin Rudd MP asking for greater attention to ageing power reticulation system given the potential fire risk.
- 27 March 2009 – Wrote to bushfire brigades in the Pearce electorate asking them for their suggestions to prevent tragedies similar to the Victoria Bushfires occurring in Australia.
- 29 April 2009 – Wrote again to Prime Minister Hon Kevin Rudd MP asking him to put issue of ageing power reticulation on the COAG agenda.
- 29 April 2009 – Wrote to Federal Minister for Resources and Energy, Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, regarding ageing Power Reticulation. This correspondence was copied to Hon Peter Collier MLC, WA Minister for Energy.
- 8 May 2009 – Met with Members of Julimar, Coondle, Central, Morangup and Bejoording volunteer bushfire services in Toodyay to discuss bushfire safety.
- 15 July 2009 – Wrote to Hon Peter Collier MLC, WA Minister for Energy, enclosing a copy of Minister Ferguson’s response asking him to consider WA’s ageing electricity infrastructure and the 2008 Distribution Wood Pole Audit Review.

- 13 August 2009 – Sent collated data of fire prevention suggestions received from Pearce volunteer bushfire brigades to the Hon Rob Johnson MLA, WA Minister for Emergency Services, and the Hon Peter Collier MLC, WA Minister for Energy
- 17 August 2009 - Sent summated results of fire prevention suggestions to local government's in Pearce including Beverley, Boddington, Brookton, Cuballing, Gingin, Kalamunda, Narrogin, Northam, Pingelly, City of Swan, Toodyay, Wandering, Williams, City of Wanneroo and York and Pearce volunteer bushfire brigades.
- 29 January 2010 – Met with Ms Jo Harrison-Ward and Mr Craig Hynds from FESA for de-briefing on Toodyay fire.*
- 4 February 2010 – Wrote to Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Rob Johnson MLA, raising specific issues regarding the Toodyay fire.

Please see **Annexure E** for correspondence and summary of ideas from volunteer bush fire brigades.

*In the course of the debriefing meeting with FESA, Ms Harrison-Ward and Mr Hynds outlined the effectiveness of recent State Government actions which have assisted with fire prevention and management including:

- recent bush fires legislation amendments
- total fire ban implementation
- State alert
- new National Fire Danger ratings
- community warnings and preparedness
- observed weather condition (rapid fire development)
- State risk assessments (mobilisation of resources)

These new measures undoubtedly assisted FESA to minimise the scope of damage in the 2009 Toodyay fire.

As well as asking the Prime Minister (23 February 2009) and the Minister for Energy and Resources, the Hon Martin Ferguson MP (29 April 2009, to place the issue of ageing power reticulation on the Council of Australian Government's Agenda, I have also spoken in the Parliament. Please see **Annexure F** for Hansard copies of speeches made on 10 February 2009, 3 February 2010 and 4 February 2010.

With the Federal Government's announcement about a substantial fund for infrastructure development I felt that such a project as power reticulation might be given a priority in the schedule of works.

Power poles are not the only fire risk factor that the ageing power reticulation system poses for the community. The following concerns were also raised in the *2008 Distribution Wood Pole Audit Review (Annexure C)*:

- The audit could not locate the records of the structural designs for each of the compatible units and the elements within them (comprising poles, cross-arms, insulators, stay wires and Conductors).

- The audit was unable to demonstrate that these elements and compatible units comply with the relevant standards, guidelines and codes of practice.
- Western Power's Poles'n'Wires Verification Report states current designs using the Poles'n'Wires software do not comply with the *Electricity (Supply Standards and Systems Safety) Regulations 2001*. EnergySafety accepts Western Power's view that the design outcomes from the Poles'n'Wires program comply substantially with the 1999 and 2006 versions of C(b)1.
- There is no technical oversight of the stay components and materials purchased to ensure they are fit for purpose within the network.
- Western Power is reviewing the structural adequacy of the components that make up the compatible units for stays and producing the necessary technical specifications for the procurement of both poles and stays.
- For pole and stay inspections the audit found there were no standards or policies defining the outcomes and accountabilities for the performance of the activities within the inspection processes.

Fixing the ageing power reticulation systems could eliminate a significant risk of fire, particularly in rural areas.

VOLUNTEERING

The feedback I received from bushfire brigades regarding volunteers was significant. Many of the volunteer fire fighters sighted the need for better communication and a closer working relationship with local Government. A break down in communication between these two groups can have a detrimental impact on planning for bushfires and in the response to fire threats.

Volunteer bushfire brigades consist mostly of volunteers approaching retirement and these members have expressed concerns regarding a lack of new young volunteers joining the service. Many fire fighters would like to see more done to promote joining the fire service, either as a fire fighter or in a support role. Please see **Annexure E** for list of recommendations from volunteer bush fire brigades.

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

An opportunity exists for creating partnerships with business and community groups. This may also assist communities by integrating response and recovery activities and arrangements. Such a partnership between the Private sector and a volunteer body was announced in the 2009 Budget as part of the Disaster Resilience Program (DRP) and has scope for further development.

AUSTRALIAN BUILDING STANDARDS

The Building Code of Australia is produced and maintained by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) on behalf of the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments. The BCA has been given the responsibility for building regulations by all States and Territories.

I understand however, that there is no obligation on local Government to enforce standards in relation to recommended materials for building in bushfire prone areas. The result is that many buildings fail to meet the criteria of the BCA. In high risk fire areas this can be problematic. The comments of Cr Chris Firms, President of the Shire of Toodyay, reported in *The West Australian* Newspaper of Tuesday 25 February 2010 (“Toodyay alerted to fire danger”, by Angela Pownall) provides some insight into the challenges of local government in this respect. It is a matter that requires further community dialogue around cost-benefit and community safety. Please see **Annexure G** for full article.

Further, the building codes require that powerlines in new developments go underground, yet when Western Power replaced lines in the Majestic Heights housing development in Toodyay following the recent fire they replaced the old timber poles for new timber power poles. Many residents of Toodyay expressed dismay that the lines were not placed underground given the continuing high risk of fire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. By taking immediate action on ageing power reticulation there is the potential to save many lives, millions of dollars of built infrastructure, stock, crops, flora and fauna as well as prevent the degradation of land for years to come.
2. State and Territory Governments together need to financially assist State utilities to upgrade energy infrastructure to an acceptable level to avoid future catastrophes.
3. There needs to be greater support for volunteers, particularly to address the challenges of volunteer recruitment, retention and training. Projects may include initiatives to increase the recruitment and retention of volunteers to emergency services and other groups that contribute to individual and community resilience. They may also be directed at improving operational capability.
4. Creating partnerships with business and community groups can assist communities by integrating response and recovery activities and arrangements during bushfires.
5. Thoroughly investigate the application of the Building Code of Australia and its implementation by States, Territories and Local Governments with a view to minimising fire risk.
6. Implement a public education service, to ensure that the public is able to access information about best building practices in fire risk prone areas.
7. Consider a Productivity Commission Report into the cost of fires in Australia with particular reference to ageing power reticulation systems as a catalyst for such events.
8. Power reticulation should be made a priority in the schedule of works under the Federal Government's announced fund for infrastructure.

I thank the Senate Select Committee on Agriculture and Related Industries for having the foresight to call such an inquiry and for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely,



HON JUDI MOYLAN MP

ANNEXURE B

Powerlines started \$10m fire

GEORGIA LONEY

Western Power has announced plans to double its spending on limiting bushfire risks after it was revealed yesterday that clashing powerlines caused bushfires that threatened homes and caused \$10 million damage to State Government pine plantations.

The State's energy watchdog has called on Western Power to defend its maintenance program after it found a split power pole top and slipped bolt caused powerlines to sag and clash, sparking blazes which razed more than 2000ha of pine plantations near Yanchepp on January 16.

Office of Energy Safety director Ken Bowron cited questions over Western Power's practices surrounding clashing powerlines at the Yanchepp fire and flagged a wider audit.

"A number of historical issues have arisen from clashing conductor incidents," Mr Bowron said yesterday.

"We have investigated and dealt with Western Power on each of these at the time of the incident and there is an ongoing dialogue between the Office of Energy Safety and Western Power to resolve all outstanding issues. We propose that we will do a formal audit on clashing conductors in the future."

The Yanchepp fire is the latest of at least 10 fires over the past seven years caused by clashing powerlines, faults or fallen power poles.

Clashing powerlines caused the Tenterden fires in 2003 that killed two women and also the Toodyay fires in 2007 which killed a local teacher.

Western Power customer services general manager Mark de Laeter said inspections had been up to date at Yanchepp but the work had not yet been carried out.

"Whilst we'd like to fix everything straight away, it's just not possible, we prioritise according to risk," Mr de Laeter said. "That's the challenging task, we've got a limited amount of funding and a limited amount of peo-



Damage done: Firefighters mop up after a blaze near Yanchepp last month that burnt \$10 million worth of pine. Clashing Western Power conductors sparked the fire.

ple that funding will pay for." He said the utility had made a submission to the State Government for \$280 million on bushfire mitigation over next three years, up from \$123 million.

"Electricity networks are inherently dangerous and we've got hundreds of thousands of line sections and millions of components and keeping up with that is a challenging task," Mr de Laeter said.

The money would be spent on conductor clashing issues, pole-top insulation and managing vegetation.

Forest Products Commission general manager Paul Biggs said the Yan-

chepp fires caused \$10 million damage to its pine plantation and he was investigating the report.

"Our main priorities are obviously to repair the damage that has been done, to the best of our ability, and to try and do what we can to reduce the risk of more fires in the future," Mr Biggs said.

"The initial cost of containing the fire, cleaning up the site and replanting is likely to be in the region of \$10 million.

"That figure does not include timber lost in the blaze, as we are still working to calculate the exact value."

FIRES CAUSED BY WESTERN POWER

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| <p>Parkererville January 3, 2008
Clearance between tree branches and powerlines not adequately maintained.</p> <p>Parryville March 7, 2007
Conductor separation insufficient, powerline not in safe condition.</p> <p>Toodyay February 2, 2007
Clashing, sagging powerlines.</p> <p>Dalryp December 2, 2004
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Fallen pole.</p> <p>West Esperance December 15, 2004
Clashing powerlines.</p> | <p>Wungong December 14, 2004
Failure to clear vegetation near powerlines and unsuitable sag of 10-voltage fase.</p> <p>Esperance December 10, 2004
Power poles fell over in strong wind, poles not reinforced.</p> <p>Esperance December 2, 2004
Pole fell because structural strength had deteriorated.</p> <p>Tenterden December 27, 2003
Clashing, sagging powerlines caused by long spars.</p> <p>Ginglin December 20, 2002
Clashing between conductors.</p> |
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SOURCE: OFFICE OF ENERGY SAFETY

-THE WEST 23/2/09

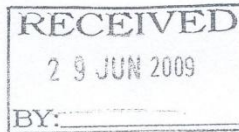
ANNEXURE D



THE HON MARTIN FERGUSON AM MP
MINISTER FOR RESOURCES AND ENERGY
MINISTER FOR TOURISM

PO BOX 6022
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

The Hon Judi Moylan MP
Member for Pearce
PO Box 1005
MIDLAND WA 6936



Min ID: C09/1650

24 JUN 2009

Dear Ms Moylan

Thank you for your letter of 29 April 2009 to the Prime Minister regarding the fire risk posed by ageing power infrastructure, and in particular the related article regarding the experience of Western Power. The Prime Minister's Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon Anthony Byrne MP referred your letter to me to provide further information in my capacity as Minister for Resources and Energy.

As noted in the article, the issue of fire risk management in relation to electricity networks is complex. Primarily, it is the responsibility of state and territory governments to regulate the fire risk presented by this infrastructure. These regulations require owners of electricity network assets to develop and submit annual bushfire mitigation plans to the relevant energy safety regulator in each jurisdiction. In Western Australia, the energy safety regulator is the Department of Commerce's EnergySafety division.

In terms of the economic aspects of this framework, distribution businesses may invest in upgrading network infrastructure for the purpose of bushfire mitigation and apply to the economic regulator to have this expense included in their regulated rate of return. For businesses in Western Australia, the economic regulator is the Economic Regulation Authority.

In the case of the recent tragedy in Victoria, I note that the Royal Commission into these bushfires will provide an assessment of the causes of the fires and any relationship with powerlines or related fire regulation strategies. The Australian Government will be watching this process with great interest and working with the Victorian Government to understand any wider implications for bushfire mitigation strategies.

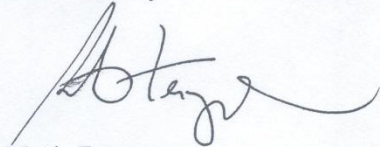
Although these matters are the responsibility of States and Territories, the broader issues surrounding the reliability and safety of energy network infrastructure have been discussed at the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE), which I chair. At its meeting on 6 February 2009 the MCE initiated work relating to heatwave and

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extreme weather events to explore ways to assist energy markets prepare for next summer. I also expect that the MCE will consider any findings of the Royal Commission as part of this work.

Thank you for bringing your views on this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Ferguson', written in a cursive style.

Martin Ferguson

ANNEXURE E

Hon Judi Moylan MP
Member for Pearce



23 FEB 2009

Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
Parliament house
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

The tragic loss of life and destruction of property, stock and wildlife in Victoria has galvanised the Parliament and made us all-too-aware of the ever-present threat of fire.

One such inferno in the Avon region of my electorate in 2007 saw a local school teacher lose her life and many farms were devastated. The fire in this case was likely caused by an old power reticulation system, which in Western Australia is 40 to 50 years old.

As you have mentioned publicly in recent days, we may need to deal with arson laws in parliaments throughout this country, we certainly must deal with ageing power infrastructure, which has been the cause of many fires in rural areas in Western Australia.

This is something we can attend to relatively easily and I ask you to consider this in planning your response to the Victorian bushfires.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Judi Moylan', written in dark ink.

JUDI MOYLAN
120209:cn

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



27 March 2009

<address1>
<address2>
<address3>

Dear <insert name>,

Following the Victorian bush fires there has been a great deal of discussion on how we can best prepare communities in a time of fire and the measures to prevent their outbreak.

Many parts of the Pearce electorate face the threat of fire, loss of life and loss of stock and property each summer.

Given the long experience of your service in fire control I would be interested in you and your colleagues' views on further measures that could be introduced to prevent such a disaster occurring.

I have already written to the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, on long-standing concerns about the risk of old power reticulation starting fires and suggested that is one issue State and Federal Governments could discuss.

It has become abundantly clear that evacuation procedures of schools and aged care facilities are of great importance.

As these matters continue to be discussed in the Federal Parliament your suggestions would be very helpful in formulating Federal policies to ensure that everything possible is done to protect communities from the ever present threat of fires.

In an effort to save paper, I encourage you to contact me via email on J.Moylan.MP@aph.gov.au, otherwise I welcome your comments via fax (08) 9294 2888, phone (08) 9294 3222 or post PO Box 1005 Midland WA 6936.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Judi Moylan', written in a cursive style.

JUDI MOYLAN



Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



29 APR 2009

Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Following the condolence motions for those who lost their lives in the tragic Victorian bush fires, I wrote to you in regard to ageing power infrastructure, which has been the cause of many fires in Western Australia. These fires have resulted in loss of human life, stock, native flora and fauna and considerable damage to farming properties, resulting in long term degradation of topsoils.

In this regard, I attach an article which appeared in the West Australian on 23rd February 2009, "Powerlines started \$10 million fire", which highlights the very real risk posed by the ageing power infrastructure.

Office of Energy Safety Director, Mr Ken Brown, has raised questions over Western Power's practices surrounding clashing powerlines.

Some of these fires have occurred in the Electorate of Pearce including Yanchep, Parkerville, Gingin, Brookton and in 2007 at Toodyay causing the tragic loss of the life of a young woman who was a local schoolteacher.

Following that fire, I wrote to Western Power about this fire. A letter was also sent to the then State Government Minister.

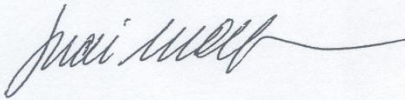
From comments following the Victorian fires, it appears that this problem also exists in other states and along with arson poses a serious risk to the community.

While I realise that power issues are normally the responsibility of State Governments, I consider the matter serious enough to explore the option of the State and Federal Government working together to find a solution.



Your consideration of options to resolve this high fire risk problem including the raising of it at the next COAG meeting would be greatly appreciated and I would appreciate your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judi Moylan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JUDI MOYLAN

Cc Hon Malcolm Turnbull, Leader of the Opposition

Powerlines started \$10m fire

GEORGIA LONEY

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"A number of historical issues have arisen from clashing conductor incidents," Mr Bowron said yesterday.

"We have investigated and dealt with Western Power on each of these at the time of the incident and there is an ongoing dialogue between the Office of Energy Safety and Western Power to resolve all outstanding issues. We propose that we will do a formal audit on clashing conductors in the future."

The Yancheep fire is the latest of at least 10 fires over the past seven years caused by clashing powerlines, faults or fallen power poles.

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cheep fires caused \$10 million damage to its pine plantation and he was investigating the report.

"Our main priorities are obviously to repair the damage that has been done, to the best of our ability, and to try and do what we can to reduce the risk of more fires in the future," Mr Biggs said.

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FIRES CAUSED BY WESTERN POWER

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Conductor became detached and pole fell.
West Esperance December 14, 2004
Fallen pole.
West Esperance December 15, 2004
Clashing powerlines.

Wungong December 14, 2004
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Clashing, sagging powerlines caused by long spans.
Ginglin December 20, 2002
Clashing between conductors.

SOURCE: OFFICE OF ENERGY SAFETY

-THE WEST 23/2/09

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



15 JUL 2009

The Hon Peter Collier MLC
Minister for Energy; Training
Level 11, Dumas House
2 Havelock St
WEST PERT WA 6005

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 2 July 2009 regarding Western Australia's ageing electricity infrastructure.

I have since received a response from the Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, Minister for Resources and Energy, which I have attached for your consideration.

Also attached is a copy of my response to Minister, which highlights the recent Audit by the energy safety regulator, of which I'm sure you would be familiar.

I have asked that he strongly consider this report while expressing my disappointment that this issue is not a national infrastructure priority.

The Minister states in his letter that, although the responsibilities of energy network infrastructure fall within the responsibilities of State and Territories, the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE) has discussed this matter previously.

He also says the findings of the Royal Commission into the Victorian bushfires will be examined at the next meeting of the MCE.

I would ask that you also consider WA's ageing power infrastructure in reviewing the Royal Commission's outcomes and continue to push this issue at a State level and at COAG.

Again, I thank you for your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Judi Moylan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JUDI MOYLAN
bm:150709:cn



Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



13 August, 2009

Hon Rob Johnson MLA
Minister for Police; Emergency Services and Road Safety
20th Floor
Governor Stirling House
197 St Georges Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Minister

Following the Victorian bush fires, I wrote to fire prevention agencies in the Pearce electorate asking for their views on measures that could be introduced to prevent such a disaster occurring in Western Australia.

A summary of the suggestions made by the Services is as follows :-

- A paid volunteer fire coordinator position for each Shire
- Better enforcement of existing firebreak laws
- Enclosed roof spaces for homes in high risk areas
- Graded warnings via a cell system
- Fuel load reduction burns
- Reconsider siting buildings on bush blocks in fire prone areas
- Designated assembly areas for residents in time of fire
- A community evacuation procedure that can be distributed to all homes
- Stricter enforcement of existing fire prevention laws.

I have assured the Services that I will forward their suggestions to you for your information and consideration.

I would welcome your comments on the suggestions made.

Yours sincerely

JUDI MOYLAN
issues.bfm.ja

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



17 August, 2009

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your suggestions in response to my request for measures to prevent bush fires in the Pearce electorate.

A summary of the suggestions made by Services is as follows :-

- A paid volunteer fire coordinator position for each Shire
- Better enforcement of existing firebreak laws
- Enclosed roof spaces for homes in high risk areas
- Graded warnings via a cell system
- Fuel load reduction burns
- Reconsider siting buildings on bush blocks in fire prone areas
- Designated assembly areas for residents in time of fire
- A community evacuation procedure that can be distributed to all homes
- Stricter enforcement of existing fire prevention laws.

I have forwarded these suggestions to the Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Road Safety, the Hon Rob Johnson MLA as well as to my State Liberal colleagues in Pearce.

As indicated by my previous correspondence I also wrote to the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, asking him to consider placing the issue of ageing power reticulation systems on the COAG agenda. A copy of this letter was sent to the Hon Peter Collier MLC, State Minister for Energy. I have since received responses from the Ministers, copies of which are attached for your information.

As the Federal Minister the Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, responding on behalf of the Prime Minister states in his letter, while these matters are the responsibility of States and Territories, the broader issues surrounding the reliability and safety of energy network infrastructure has been discussed at COAG's Ministerial Council on Energy.

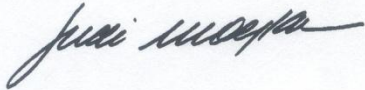
I have since written again to Minister Ferguson and Minister Collier asking for immediate action to avoid the possible destruction of lives, millions of dollars of built infrastructure, stock, crops, flora and fauna as well as the degradation of productive land for years to come.



2/.

A desire to protect Western Australia and the electorate of Pearce from bush fire is something we all share and I thank you for your participation. Once again I extend to all members my thanks for the tremendous work done on behalf of the community.

Yours sincerely



JUDI MOYLAN
issues.bfm.ja

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Member for Pearce



4 FEB 2010

The Hon R Johnson MLA
Minister for Police; Emergency Services
20th Floor
Governor Stirling Tower
197 St Georges Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Minister

Thank you for facilitating a meeting with Ms Jo Harrison-Ward and Mr Craig Hynds from FESA, which was held on the 29th January 2010, for a debrief on the Toodyay fires.

At the meeting I raised a number of questions with Ms Harrison-Ward who suggested that I write directly to you, so that a formal response may be prepared.

1. Given the risk of fire from rail operations in rural areas, Mr Kevin Hug from the Moondine Caravan Park, has asked why volunteer groups are not allowed to carry out fire prevention including clearing and burning near railway tracks? Mr Hug is of the view that volunteer groups could greatly assist local authorities and fire brigades with this work and thus reduce the risk of fire from this source.
2. Mr Leon Ryan, a farmer in Toodyay, does not believe it is sensible to have blanket automatic catastrophic fire bans. Mr Ryan has proposed a number of amendments to make the fire bans more practical. A copy of correspondence received from Mr Ryan is enclosed and I would be most appreciative for your consideration of his suggestion and response in due course.
3. Mr Frank Panizza queried why in the eastern states they have a one shot policy before the system closes down, where in WA it is 4.

I look forward to your advice in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Judi Moylan'.

JUDI MOYLAN
Issues.toodyayfires.ja



ANNEXURE G

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2010

News

thewest.com.au

News 5
the west

Toodyay alerted to fire danger

ANGELA POWNALL

Fire control officers warned of the risk of a serious bushfire in Toodyay weeks before December's devastating blaze, which destroyed 39 properties and razed 2900ha.

In the wake of the fatal Victorian bushfires, officers asked the Shire of Toodyay to designate the area as "bushfire prone" as early as September last year but the council did not endorse their proposals.

The designation of an area as bushfire prone requires residential development to meet Australian building standards designed to reduce the risk of bushfire damage.

In WA, part of the Shire of Busselton has been designated as bushfire

prone. Toodyay shire president Chris Firms said changes to planning laws were not in the pipeline and the rebuilding of homes destroyed in the December 29 blaze, and any other future developments, would not have to meet the bushfire standards.

Cr Firms said the council did not back the proposal when it was officially put before it in November because it had not seen evidence that the standards reduced bushfire damage and because they could add up to \$90,000 to home-building costs.

Deputy chief bush fire control officer Alan Knapp said in the report to the council that Toodyay had very high to extreme bushfire risk areas.

"The potential risk of damage to life and property is of concern," he



Destroyed: Toodyay is rebuilding after the devastating blaze in December.

said. "Declaring portions of the Shire of Toodyay bushfire prone would reduce the risk of damage to life and property in the event of bushfire."

In September a discussion paper

about designating parts of Toodyay bushfire prone was presented to a forum and the shire's bushfire advisory committee, which later recommended the proposal to the council.

The Australian Building Standard AS 3959 lists construction requirements designed to reduce the likelihood of ignition when the property comes under bushfire attack, such as stainless steel mesh screens instead of nylon, a gutter guard, fire-resistant timber and sealing the junction between brick walls and the roof.

But they come at a cost to the home builder. The discussion paper said it would cost about \$21,000 more to build a pole house in a moderate risk location of a designated bushfire-prone area. The estimated cost rises to

more than \$90,000 for a pole house in an area deemed to be at an extreme risk of bushfires.

Cr Firms said the council report did not contain enough information for councillors to make a decision and left questions unanswered about whether the standards would make a difference and the cost implications.

"I think it's a big mistake for us to go and whack a \$90,000 bill to somebody so they have to comply with these standards in their house, potentially costing the shire millions of dollars, and not understanding what the benefits are," he said.

Cr Firms said he feared the building standards could give people a false sense of security that their homes would become havens in bushfires.