

## Supplementary questions for witnesses appearing at the hearing on 6 March 2025 – Inquiry into the electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024

### Mining and Energy Union

1. What were the main issues that your members required support for during the outages? The main issues facing members was the uncertainty of the process and how long it would take to be resolved. With the mines being shut and the lack of suitable alternate duties on offer by the mining companies for WHS issues that come with no power, people were stood down with no pay. The Union negotiated with the companies to allow the use of leave entitlements, which allowed for income to pay bills. Unfortunately there were a lot of people that didn't have sufficient leave balances, or are contractors on a casual employment arrangement that don't accrue leave, therefore they were faced with no work, no pay. This put a massive strain on the budgets of families and had an impact on peoples mental health. I had members that were casual employees with no income for an unknown period of time. A few of these had to leave the family in Broken Hill and source whatever work they could interstate in any capacity they could find just to pay the bills and feed the family. Add to that the family left behind in Broken Hill had no power, fridges of food that had to be thrown out, kids that required looking after as schools were shut. In some cases due to one parent having to leave town for work, the parent at home had to miss scheduled part time employment if the job they had was available to be done due to generator power. With the leave being used through this power outage to maintain income, it impacted planned future leave and ate into savings of those with no leave. Members had leave booked for the birth of children in the new year that was now unavailable as it was used through the power outage. The impact this has on families that you can't spend the time for the birth of your child as you have no leave. The option is time off with no pay, which adds extra stresses on the family unit.
2. How have your members been supported, in regards to the mental strain endured during and post the power outage? The Union encourages members to take advantage of Employee Assistance Programs on offer and reach out to providers if in need. As this has caused a massive upset to families and caused mental health issues, there is a concern that people will put their mental health needs on the backburner and stay working, regardless of the impact on their own mental state. If treatment requires time off work to heal and they have no leave and rely on an income to provide for the family, the mental health takes a back seat. The Union is increasing awareness on these situations, as we hope the Companies and Government would as well.
3. Are members experiencing ongoing stress due to the lack of trust in the delivery of power and therefore access to their jobs? Yes, the stress is ongoing. For the above stated reasons, if this happens again and people are forced into the same situation, many will not recover. This is a legitimate fear, to the point people have left town to areas that are more secure. This is a detriment to the Region. Add onto that Broken Hill has a few projects earmarked, Cobalt Blue, Hawson's Iron Ore, Hydrostor, projects that will provide employment for locals. The concern is an unreliable power grid may deter investment in the area.
4. How could the emergency response have been more effective to support your members during the uncertain periods of power supply? Communication needed to be better. This situation has arisen in 2019 and the Essential Energy team were great at communication. They minimised the power disruption by getting a temporary line ran along the ground providing power to the region whilst permanent repairs were made. Minimal disruption when transferring to the new towers. The flow on effect of this created clarity for mines to maintain operation with known outages. This gave employees the ability to minimise loss of wages or use of leave. Information shared was better in previous situations.

Thank you.

Kind Regards,

Todd Ferguson

MEU Organiser

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