

Quote No L25/644
JN:LB

Telephone / Personal Enquiries
Ask for Mr Jay Nankivell

2 April 2025

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Dear Chair,

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

1. Has the Council conducted a review of its operations during the power outage in October and November 2024?

a. If so, can you provide a copy of this review?

Due to some staff changes within our Risk department, a comprehensive review of our operations and Business Continuity Process (BCP) during the Power Outage is not yet completed, however a summary of preliminary findings are listed below.

In regard the LEMC, a review has not been completed, however this has been scheduled by the REMO as per the email attachment.

b. If such a review is confidential, then can you provide a summary of the key findings?

What Worked Well

- Council's BCP was activated in a timely fashion on the 18 October 2024 and all staff were required to refresh their understanding and role in the event of an extended power outage.
- Council's operations continued uninterrupted apart from customer facing services on the Tuesday 22 October 2024, while generators to all sites were delivered and connected.
- Required staff attended Council's declared BCP location the morning of the Blackout on the 22 October for further instruction as well as to coordinate manual processes for business continuity.
- Communication was relayed to all staff as per our BCP, which included house visits for affected administration and operational staff.
- Communication to the general public was provided via radio and social media.
- The Airport's Generator activated immediately, and air services were uninterrupted for the duration of the blackouts.
- Timely updates on Council's BCP as well as updated from the REMC were provided daily to Councillors and on an as needs basis based on the number of meetings held.
- Additional diesel was sourced, and all staff were required to use this as opposed to the City's supply, due to the limited power supply to petrol stations. **Cont'd...**

- All staff were paid on time via manual payroll and banking processes.
- Traffic Control was provided to ensure smooth flows of traffic during excessive lineups at the Petrol Stations with generators installed.
- Additional waste services were activated to ensure timely collection of spoiled food waste from residents and businesses.
- The Aged Persons Rest Centre (site with a backup Generator) was swiftly activated as an Emergency Respite centre, providing cooling, electricity and refreshments for visitors.
- Coordination with the Broken Hill Musicians Club as an alternate centre for residents who provided a dispensation to allow minors into certain areas of the club.
- Coordination with local emergency services to ensure Council was assisting where required.
- Coordination with Essential Energy for the delivery of transformers to vulnerable sites as well as Council facilities.
- Council staff provided facilities and services for the delivery of food hampers, vouchers and temporary Service NSW locations for additional support.

Future Opportunities for Improvement

- Permanent backup generator to be installed at the Broken Hill Civic Centre as the major Emergency Evacuation Centre.
- Council's solar project to incorporate larger batteries and wired generators to ensure ongoing power supply during any major outages.
- The Reconstruction Authority didn't take on feedback from either Broken Hill City Council or Central Darling Shire Council in relation to the distribution of food hampers. Both Council's suggested food vouchers would be more appropriate, given supermarkets were operational with backup generators and the experienced during COVID-19 was that, there was major wastage and staff resources absorbed in managing and distributing the hampers. This again occurred, with the delivery of the hampers to both Broken Hill and Central Darling and then became a Council problem after this, despite the feedback that was already given around how successful they would be in uptake.
- Communication with staff and residents via telecommunication was inhibited when the South Tower lost power. A longer-term backup supply by telecommunication providers would be a good solution to aid in this problem.
- Upgrade to the Broken Hill Airport to improve ability and logistics for large scale support in the event of an emergency to the great Far West Region.

2. Has the Council (or REMC or LEMC) conducted training exercises in relation to an emergency caused by a power outage?

Council has conducted an exercise around power outage affecting Council's operations, however this was limited to Council's Business Continuity and not the entire City. This was performed as part of our bi-annual testing of our BCP Processes and procedures.

The LEMC conducts annual training exercises on emergencies, but it has not performed one solely based on a power outage to my knowledge or at least in the previous 10 years.

3. In your submission, you raise concerns about poor and inconsistent communication to Council, the Local and Regional Emergency Management Committees and local media.

a. Can you outline what communications you did receive during the outages? What was the main source of information regarding the emergency?

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The information was primarily coming through the Regional Emergency Management Officer (REMO), either via email, text message and through the REMC meetings when they occurred. There was additional information provided to the Council as part of continuing operations that were from Essential Energy as well as TransGrid.

Council was also in direct contact with Essential Energy around the vulnerable sites for the City and this commenced on Friday the 18 October 2024. This included assistance with generator locations, key contact details for sites

b. What aspects of the communications were poor or inconsistent? How could these issues be prevented in the event of future emergencies?

The inconsistencies, primarily related to what Council would hear from the Executives of Transgrid themselves when speaking directly with Council in relation to the capacity and timing of backup generators and when they would be connected to the Substation versus what was coming through the REMC meetings. Ultimately what was being relayed in the REMC was closer to the truth, than what was being communicated externally.

In addition, there were also communication barriers within the REMC in regard to the timing of the information that was being filtered through. An example is that on the evening of Monday 21 October (the commencement of the full day blackout for Broken Hill), when the backup generator (gas turbine) failed it was initially reported via the REMO that it was just overloaded, and they were working on getting it back online. At the same time, there were rumours circulating (from contractors working onsite), that it had in fact had an internal fire and would potentially be out for an extended period of time if not indefinitely. It was a further two hours before this information was circulated through to the REMC and then a further two hours before the REMC met online. In addition to this, ABC Radio would report on information that had yet to be presented to the REMC, which was ultimately correct in factual, however this meant the Media and community were finding out important updates before the emergency services/committee.

Furthermore, there was also inconsistencies in messaging around the timing of the temporary towers being erected. Specifically in relation to expectations from previous events where the main towers were destroyed and the utilities providers involved at the time, to the messaging and timing provided by Transgrid.

To address this in the future, timely information needs to be reported via the REMC to ensure consistent and one point for factual information. The REMC did make it clear, that all communication and updated to the community would be provided by Essential Energy and Transgrid. This was provided via text messages, facebook, website updates along with radio to ensure consistent messaging, however a lot of trust and goodwill can be lost early on, when the REMC members stick to the messaging whilst rumours that are circulating broadly amongst the community are closer to the truth than what is initially being communicated via the REMC.

c. How did the telecommunications outages impact these communication issues?

The telecommunication outages impacted the broader community, but mainly South Broken Hill via messaging being distributed along with business continuity, however they did not affect the communication or coordination of the REMC. The communication issues that we have raised in our submission, is purely around inconsistencies.

That being said, the telecommunication outages in various parts of Broken Hill affected the ability of residents to contact emergency services if required, but furthermore as per our previous submission, the telecommunication outages affected outlying areas to the point that the community could not contact Emergency services or the hospital.

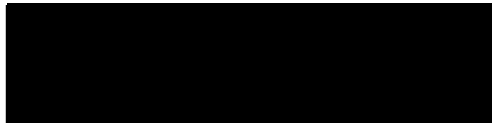
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During one of our REMC meetings, Ambulance NSW advised that they were about to lose their radio communication completely due to the tower outages.

4. Is the Local Emergency Management Plan for the LGA publicly available? Can you provide a copy of the Local EMPLAN?

There is no publicly available copy of the Broken Hill Emergency Management Plan. Attached is a copy of the Local EMPLAN.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

JAY NANKIVELL
GENERAL MANAGER

**Attachments have been
redacted**