

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 579

asked on Thursday, 20 May 2004

MRS PRATT ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, MINES AND ENERGY (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to contacting Energex during emergencies and to complaints about Energex only having one contact number for consumers to contact during emergencies and to severe storms earlier in the year, in particular, where the Energex telephone line was blocked—

- (1) Does he intend to increase the number of lines for emergencies, or add additional lines for customers unable to get through to report service problems?
- (2) What were the total number of emergency calls made to Energex by its customers between 1 January 2004 and 31 March 2004?
- (3) What was the average waiting time to answer and respond to these calls?
- (4) What measures were implemented to combat these problems?

ANSWER:

- (1) I am advised as a result of the storm events in January and March of this year, Energex is conducting a review of its total storm response strategies, including its systems and processes, to ensure improvement opportunities are identified and implemented. Energex has already implemented a number of improvements to enhance the capacity of the Contact Centre as well as other areas within Energex to deal with events such as these.

Improvements to the Energex Contact Centre include -

- an additional interactive voice response (IVR) unit and new software installed onto another IVR unit;
 - an additional 125 telephone lines available to the Contact Centre;
 - additional links between Telstra and the Contact Centre; and
 - improved on-site technical support at the Contact Centre to deal with any telephone line and/or software issues as they arise.
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Energex has also recently completed a customer service representative recruitment drive. This recruitment drive has resulted in Energex hiring 36 additional customer service representatives.

- (2) I am advised by Energex that Telstra attempted to pass 1.7 million calls to the Energex Contact Centre between 1 January 2004 and 31 March 2004. This number of calls is almost three times the total calls for the entire 2003 calendar year.

Energex has also advised that the Telstra communications network supporting Energex's Emergency Loss of Supply number (13 62 62) has a capability of handling 25,000 calls per hour. During the peak of the storms over this period, Telstra has advised Energex that it was recording in excess of 70,000 calls per hour to that number.

- (3) I am advised that when a customer calls the Energex Contact Centre, Energex's IVR system utilizes software to identify the customer's phone number, attribute it to a suburb postcode, and is then able to automatically provide the customer with storm damage and power outage information for that suburb.

I understand that during a normal storm event, it is Energex's experience that 60 percent to 70 percent of customers are satisfied with the information provided by the IVR. That is, only two in five callers will stay on the line to speak to a customer service representative (CSR) after hearing the information automatically provided by the IVR. Most of these calls to CSRs are to report damage or an event that may be related to the power outage.

During the abnormal storm events in January 2004, customers who initially called the Energex Contact Centre received power outage information within 80 seconds on average, while customers who wished to speak to a CSR waited for up to 180 seconds, and talked to the CSR for an average of 95 seconds.

As the length of the power outages progressed, the proportion of callers wishing to speak to a CSR increased from 30 percent to over 70 percent. That is, four in five callers wanted to speak to a CSR, generally to seek further information or register a comment as to the length of the outage.

Due to the increase in the proportion of people staying on the line to talk to a CSR, rather than just listen to the outage information provided by the IVR, the average wait time to talk to a CSR increased from 180 seconds to 240 seconds. The average time customers talked to the CSRs also increased from 95 seconds to 180 seconds during this period.

- (4) As detailed in my response to (1), Energex has already implemented a number of initiatives and measures to enhance the capacity of the
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Contact Centre, as well as other areas within Energex in order to deal with events such as the severe storms experienced in January of this year.

In addition, on 1 March 2004 the Government announced a detailed Independent Review of the performance of Queensland's electricity distribution networks which will be undertaken by three experts, Mr Darryl Somerville, Mr Steve Blanch and Mr Jack Camp.

The Independent Panel is currently considering the information provided through the public submission process and other investigations. It is anticipated that the Independent Panel will report its findings and recommendations to Cabinet mid year.

The Review of the distribution networks incorporates a Review of the Energex and Ergon Energy Contact Centres which had been initiated late last year by the Honourable Paul Lucas MP.
