

Question on Notice
No. 923
Asked on 31 August 2004

Dr Flegg asked the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the agreement reached between the Government and Radio Station 96.5FM—

Will he detail the full terms of this exclusive arrangement (including any financial payments, additional equipment upgrades, provision of equipment such as backup generators and/or additional funding for extra announcers)?

ANSWER:

The Government itself has no arrangement in place with radio station 96.5FM.

Energex has entered into a non-exclusive arrangement for 96.5FM to provide detailed, comprehensive updates on power outage information and restoration times during severe weather events.

The best way people can keep informed about power restoration is to have a battery operated radio handy or listen in a car to their favourite radio station for updates.

Better use of media outlets would not only keep the public better informed, but also ease pressure on the Energex Call Centre.

During last summer's wild storms, the Energex call centre went into meltdown after customers jammed the system with more than 1,225,000 calls.

The Independent Review Panel said it was unrealistic to expect that any call centre should be able to respond to that exceptionally high number of calls.

I emphasise that the arrangements give 96.5FM no exclusive information and that information being provided by Energex will be available to all radio stations.

But 96.5 FM will broadcast comprehensive power restoration updates every 15 minutes to keep customers fully informed during storms and other severe weather events.

While all radio stations will have access to the same information, 96.5FM will provide Energex with a guaranteed, comprehensive, information service to customers at times when other stations may not be able to provide the same information due to programming arrangements.

Energex is also talking to other commercial radio stations and the ABC to improve the flow of information to the public during severe weather events.

But other stations may have other priorities and important broadcasts to make. They may not be able to interrupt their programs every 15 minutes to give comprehensive and highly-detailed lists.

96.5 FM is ideal because it broadcasts over a wide area of the South East covering Brisbane and an area stretching from Caloundra to Helensvale and west from Redland Shire to Ipswich.

This partnership between Energex and 96.5 FM also reflects the Panel's recommendation that the distribution companies should investigate opportunities to better use the media as a means of providing public information during times of major power disruptions.

Energex will still be providing regular electricity restoration updates to local radio station newsrooms during these events.

Radio station 96.5FM will also recruit and train three designated announcers as Storm Announcers to be used for storm call outs.