

SPEECH

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STATUTES AMENDMENT (SMART METERS) BILL

Mr BROCK (Frome) (12:39): I also rise to speak on this bill. I certainly will be supporting the bill, as it applies in a voluntary manner. It has been very evident from speakers on this side of the house, including my fellow Independent colleagues on my left-hand side, that this is going to assist some people to manage—and I say 'only manage'—their expenditure on the cost of power. We must remember, Mr Deputy Speaker that the cost of power will still be, over a period of time, the same unless these people start to use power in times of best opportunity.

I will just relate my own personal experience. Like many on this side of the house, we have solar panels, so we are able to manage our power costs. My partner has a hairdressing salon and she has a habit of always leaving power points on when they are not being utilised. My office gives kits to residents to be able to manage how much power is being utilised when power points are on. I think that is one of the biggest issues we have. We have power coming from power points and, if you have double adapters connected, you are still using standby power. I think that is what we have to get through to our residents.

The member for Chaffey has already indicated that he has citrus growers pumping water, etc. The electorate of Frome is no different; we have grape growers in the Clare Valley. The biggest challenge we have is not only the cost of electricity, but also the exorbitant cost of water in the electorate of Frome because we have industrial users. Whilst this is a separate subject, the cost of water is another area we need to look at, because our local councils are finding it very hard to manage the cost of not only their electricity but also their water.

I think the member for Schubert mentioned that the current technology is certainly outdated; it has been there for many years. With the exception of a couple of power suppliers just recently supplying bills on a monthly basis, you usually get them every three or four months. By that time you have already used the power and whether or not it has been efficiently used, you still have to pay that bill.

Even though these smart meters are voluntary, I will certainly be promoting them once this bill gets through and the system comes into place. I will be encouraging my constituents to look at that opportunity and try to prove that this is a way of being able to use power at the most opportune time. Whether it is a freezer, a washing machine, or whatever it may be, people should manage and utilise their appliances at the best opportunity.

The member for Fisher has also indicated that the use of power across South Australia has reduced dramatically, but the cost itself has continued to rise, and that is a big issue in this state. The biggest thing this state ever did was to sell some of our essential services, and the Electricity Trust was one of those. We are never going to get them back. Unfortunately, the grain facility is going the same way. We are now getting away from co-ops and we are having monopolies. We have deregulated power in South Australia. Power suppliers in South Australia, as I understand, have been deregulated, so there is plenty of opportunity there. I encourage my constituents to look at every opportunity.

In Port Pirie, for argument's sake, we have 13 power suppliers that we are able to utilise. I encourage my constituents to use those suppliers and put them against each other to get the best price, but I will also be pushing very strongly for these smart meters. However, regarding the cost of power—and I am looking to the minister again—I think that the federal side is not deregulated. There is no deregulation, so again there is a monopoly there.

Consumers certainly need to know now how much power they are using on a daily basis and when is the best time to use it, and certainly not get a bill in three or four months' time. I will be supporting this bill, but I think this state needs to actually look at new ways to assess people in need, whether it is industries, but certainly pensioners in particular, people on fixed incomes, because they are really struggling at the moment. I think that is an issue that both sides of the house here needs to take into consideration. We need to work cooperatively to ensure that we get the best costs and systems for those less fortunate people out there and also to encourage more industries to come here.

As the member for Mount Gambier has indicated, this is not going to help everybody. However, I will certainly be supporting this bill. I will be encouraging my constituents to look at smart meters, pointing out the benefits that could be available to them. Once this happens, I will be one of the first to install a smart meter at my house to show people how it can be done. However, again, we need to look at ways of reducing the cost of power full stop. I commend the bill to the house.

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for Mineral Resources and Energy, Minister for Housing and Urban Development) (12:44): First of all, I thank members who have made contributions to this bill. I think this is an important reform that the Standing Council on Energy and Resources ministers were reluctant to pursue. The reason they were reluctant to pursue it was the experience in Victoria. I think it is fair to say that smart meters are a controversial topic. I listened with intent to the shadow minister for energy's contribution when he lamented 30,000 metres per year being changed and them not being rolled out to new smart meters.

This policy will allow people to maintain their old meters. I assume what he was saying in his remarks is that, if he were the minister for energy, he would compel people to put a smart meter in their homes if they were changing their meter or building a new development. That is very different from the policy that he released. I welcome that he has released a policy on energy. I think that is a good thing and we will have more to say about that policy very soon, and then I will thank him personally.

I think it is fair to say that when a government gets criticised for introducing notice of a bill before your opponents release a policy asking you to do exactly what it is you have put in the bill, it is really a compliment. Fancy being criticised for not having done this sooner. I have looked back at the member for Waite's remarks before he released his policy calling on me to bring in smart meters and I found no evidence of it at all. When the government deregulated electricity pricing in this state, the first thing that the opposition said was that we should have done it sooner. So, I went and checked and, of course, there were no calls for us to deregulate before we did it. Now it is the same.

I also note that we have submitted rule changes on behalf of the standing council. Officials have submitted a rule change request to the AEMC, which seeks to implement a competitive rollout of smart meters—retailers, distributors or registered third parties. That is why I am doing this. That is why I said I was doing this. So, it is disingenuous in the extreme for members opposite to say that we have no policy when we have a bill before the parliament. Who is going to take you seriously when you say that? We are actually here voting on a bill to take away my powers to roll out smart meters so that we can have a competitive market on smart meters, and he says, 'Where is your policy on it?' We are about to vote on it. How much clearer can we be?