

The Chairman
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
of New South Wales
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

18 January 2001

Dear Sir/madam

Undergrounding Electricity Cables In NSW

In writing about the immense benefits of undergrounding electricity cables in NSW I do not feel that I need go into detail on matters such as:

- Reduced motor vehicle accidents and fatalities
- Reduced losses caused by outages
- Reduced maintenance costs
- Reduced tree pruning costs
- Reduced transmission losses
- Reduced bush fire risks
- Indirect economic effects such as employment

These are apparent to all concerned and have received a great deal of media attention over past weeks.

I would however, like to instance a benefit which has received little coverage and is of immense importance in times of emergency such as recent storms and bush fires.

Sydney and an increasing number of areas in NSW are prone to major storms and bushfires. In both instance the first utility to suffer is the loss of power due to the collapse of the current aerial network. It is at these times that power is required more so than at any other time. Power is required for most modern day telephones and is required to pump water. Without power those in the midst of the natural disaster are unable to communicate and in some instances must stand by and watch their homes and belongings crumble in front of them. An underground utility does not suffer to anywhere near the extent that an aerial utility suffers in such times.

Further, in early 1999 Sutherland Shire Council and the local emergency services released information on a warning system called PC Cop. This system originated in Perth where aerial cables are already being buried. The system allows nominated callers such as police and firefighters to 'phone through a warning message to a special switchboard. The message is then relayed from the switchboard to affected households in designated zones via the telephone. The message could be used to warn residents of encroaching bushfires, natural disasters etc. Unfortunately those connected with its trial did not think of the important role played by power and communication infrastructure which in the Sutherland Shire is mainly aerial (ie both power and communication) and of course the first to suffer during disaster. In other words we are being denied a potentially life saving service which is available in cities where infrastructure is underground.

The technology of today, available to both commerce and the community, requires up to date infrastructure and this does not include antiquated aerial cabling, whether it be for power or communication.

Yours faithfully

Greg Bleazard