

Adam Johnston

Mr Thomas Perry,
Chairman,
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal.,
P.O. Box Q 290,
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

Dear Mr Perry,

Re: Underground Electricity Cables in NSW

Quite clearly, putting electricity cables underground would have many benefits. Firstly, there is the visual amenity from the lines no longer being visible. There is also the removal of the risk that power lines will become entangled in trees and other foliage. Additionally, during inclement weather, the power supply infrastructure is less vulnerable to damage. This would mean reduced maintenance costs and, (hopefully) less power failures during storms.

Despite these benefits, I am yet to be convinced that placing cables underground requires the general community to pay yet another special levy. There has been some media comment that this may be the means by which the initiative is funded. You will find attached to this submission, a copy of an unpublished letter I submitted to the Sydney Morning Herald late last year.

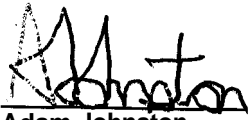
While it is admittedly somewhat tongue-in-cheek, there is a more serious underlying point. It is my understanding that as a result of the success of the Olympic Games and a growing economy, the New South Wales State Budget is in surplus. Also, it will be recalled that upon the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Federal Government indicated the revenue was destined for State Government coffers. Furthermore, the revenue collected from the GST increases as the economy expands.

Beyond this, there are the vast array of taxes, charges, fines and lotteries which become part of consolidated revenue. In my opinion, the State Government should look to consolidated revenue and its surplus, before asking NSW taxpayers to put their hands in their pockets yet again. We already pay for the use of electricity and, the telegraph poles which support the above ground cables stand on nature strips owned by local councils; as residents of local government areas, the people of NSW already pay rates to local government. All these charges are understandable. However, paying a levy to have somebody dig up your nature strip to put your electricity cables in the trench created, sounds like double or triple payment.

Ultimately, I am beginning to wonder what we have State governments for? Do we pay State taxes and charges to have the privilege of paying another levy to receive a public service? This is virtually the case, if we are asked to pay a levy for underground electricity cables. Equally, such a levy will almost certainly mean that pensioners and other low income earners will not enjoy the benefits of underground cables. Furthermore, if the levy is charged on the basis of the size of a particular property, farmers and others in rural and remote areas of New South Wales will end up paying more. This is hardly fair, as many of these people may have a substantial asset in their property, but limited liquidity; that is, they are asset rich but cash poor.

Under section 99 of the Federal Constitution, the Commonwealth Government is prohibited from discriminating against a State or part thereof. Regrettably, I am unaware of any similar provision in the State Constitution. Yet, as described above, I think that a strong element of discrimination exists in adopting a "user pays" method, for funding the laying of underground cables. Again, in many respects, such a proposal would be akin to asking the community to pay two and three times for a service they are already receiving.

Yburs sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Johnston", written over a horizontal line.

Adam Johnston

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Letters Editor,
SMH,

Dear Sir,

Given that most telephone survey companies place calls in the midst of the evening meal, *it is* hardly surprising that there was a positive response to the suggestion of a levy being imposed, *in* order to electricity cables underground. Most of the "Chardonnay set" who were quizzed would have been pickled. Therefore, answers given under the influence of alcohol should be dismissed as unreliable. (Bury power lines and we will pay, say Sydneysiders, SMH, 24/12/01)

Yours sincerely,

A Johnston

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