

4th February 2002

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office
NSW 1230

Dear Sir or Madam:

Undergrounding Electricity Cables in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment on the issues outlined in the terms of reference for the IPART review of 'Undergrounding Electricity Cables in NSW'.

My interest in the undergrounding of electricity cables has increased since the death of two of my cousins in their 20's (milkmen) from fallen power lines in the storms of 1986. Apart from the inherent danger of storm / bushfire damage of above ground wires, I am also concerned with the visual and environmental pollution and the accumulative impact of radiation of above ground wires. My comment however seeks to offer avenues for reducing the cost of underground wiring.

Private domain

I am aware that most local government areas require the undergrounding of services in new subdivisions and this is achieved primarily through local environmental plans and /or development control plans. I do however believe that planning instruments should also make it compulsory for new developments (and / or additions to an existing development) to underground services from the building to the property line. The cost of doing this would be borne by the developer.

Underground wiring is a long-term issue and I believe State planning instruments should reflect this approach to ease the cost burden over time.

Public domain

Some years ago 'natural gas' came to most residents of the Blue Mountains. I wrote at that time to our local member Mr Bob Debus questioning why the government could not take advantage (as did a cable company) to underground electricity into a common trench. I thought that certain financial economies of scale could be achieved particularly on the labour intensive effort involved in the construction and rehabilitation of the trenches. The response received at that time was limited. I put this question again, could not economies of scale be achieved through co-ordination of trenches and /or single location trench in the road reserve, whereby underground wiring is installed with any pathway, trench or roads works. This could be factored into the cost of the proposed works and funded from such sources as road levies, Council rates etc.

In conclusion, I reiterate that underground wiring is a long term issue, I would however prefer to see priority given to underground wiring in areas which have indigenous or significant vegetation issues, bushfire and heritage issues and areas which are tourist routes, vistas or panoramas. I believe that with a few changes in policy such as the incorporation of underground wiring in all road works, changes to planning instruments, better co-ordination in road reserve trench management etc., that costs could more readily absorbed by the government and the community. I would also be prepared to pay the extra to have the power outside my home placed underground – for me, the additional cost does not compare with the loss of two great blokes.

Yours faithfully

Marlene Jones