



Media Release



Tuesday, 2 April 2013

Launch of multi-million dollar campaign to keep NSW electricity network in public hands

Electricity unions will today launch a multi-million dollar community campaign against a proposal by the O'Farrell Government to sell the state's electricity poles and wires monopoly to pay for unfunded election commitments.

A state-wide poll of 1801 people — commissioned by the campaign partners — has revealed the community is overwhelmingly opposed to the plan, with 80 per cent of people saying the electricity network should be owned by the public and operated to benefit the community, while 86 per cent said they believed power prices would rise if the poles and wires were privatised.

The campaign — spearheaded by the Electrical Trades Union, United Services Union, Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia and Public Service Association — includes an initial commitment of \$1.5 million to fund advertising, community events and campaigning in key electorates.

“Our polling confirms that the people of NSW are overwhelmingly against this proposal — as revealed last month by Treasurer Mike Baird — because they believe it is bad economics, bad politics, and bad for their communities,” ETU secretary Steve Butler said.

“Of the almost two-thousand people polled, 87 per cent said the issue would have some impact on how they vote at the next election, 80 per cent said the electricity network should remain in public ownership and 71 per cent said they believed government does a better job of running the poles and wires than a private company would.

“These sentiments were even stronger in many regional areas, where the impact of potential service reductions or cost increases would be most acutely felt.

“The experiences of network privatisation in Victoria — where Black Saturday bushfire victims are currently suing the foreign multi-national whose faulty maintenance of the electricity network sparked several of the deadly blazes — also seemed to weigh heavily on many in the community. Ninety-two per cent of those polled said foreign companies should not be allowed to own important infrastructure such as our electricity network.

“If a bad government reduces services, the community can vote them out, but when large multinationals get their hands on essential services like the electricity network, the community has no recourse except expensive, time-consuming battles through the courts.”

United Services Union general secretary Graeme Kelly said the campaign would seek to debunk the myth that privatisation would be good for consumers.

“South Australia has the highest electricity prices in Australia following the privatisation of their poles and wires, while power prices in NSW remain cheaper than Victoria where privatisation has been hailed a success,” Mr Kelly said.

“Here in NSW, the community also gets the benefits of the dividends paid by these state-owned corporations, which deliver more than \$2.5 billion every year to the state’s coffers to fund hospitals, schools and community services.

“Our polling shows that most people in NSW already understand this, with 86 per cent saying they believe electricity prices will go up if the government privatises our network.

“The transmission lines which bring power from the generators, down to the poles and wires running down your street, are a natural monopoly, where there is no possibility of competition. That makes it impossible for consumers get a good deal when it comes to price, maintenance and service delivery, as they have no other choice.

“This campaign is about bringing together working people and the broader community to demand the O’Farrell Government move away from this proposal to ensure essential services like electricity are kept in public hands.”

Launch of anti-privatisation campaign:

When: 11.30am, Tuesday, 2 April 2013

Where: Hospital Road, Sydney (Behind Parliament)

Media comment: Steve Butler (Electrical Trades Union) 0414 877 679
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