

WA risks power shortages, Premier warns

Amanda O'Brien, WA political reporter | *December 10, 2008*

PREMIER Colin Barnett has warned that Western Australia could face power shortages within a year because its network is in disarray.

In an extraordinary message to potential investors, Mr Barnett said he could not guarantee long-term domestic supply.

"I am concerned about the security of energy supplies in Western Australia and I am concerned about the cost of electricity and gas," he said.

Mr Barnett said supplies were "probably" secure this summer but "for the next two or three summers, I'm not so confident".

His comments caused immediate alarm in the business sector, which lost billions of dollars this year when a gas explosion at Varanus Island cut gas supplies to the state by one-third for several months.

The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry's executive director of industry policy, Trevor Lovelle, said industry would be "enormously concerned" if the Premier's comments were correct. However, Mr Lovelle downplayed some of the claims.

But Mr Barnett said the combination of a lack of long-term planning by the former government, the disastrous break-up of the state's power utility, Western Power, and a legacy of ageing infrastructure had put the state at risk.

"The system is broken. It is broken and we have to fix it," the Premier said.

Opposition leader Eric Ripper accused the Premier of "speaking in ignorance" and scare-mongering at the worst possible time.