

Zapped 30% more for electricity than the Great South-Beast

WATT A BILL

SHOCKER

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A SHOCK comparison has discovered businesses in Cairns are paying 30 per cent more for electricity than those in Brisbane while an average household is slugged a fifth extra. It amounts to hundreds of dollars in additional payouts each year.

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BUSINESSES in regional Queensland are being slugged up to 30 per cent more for their power than those in the south-east, a consumer group claims.

Households outside the major urban concentration pay up to a fifth more.

Queensland Electricity Users Network co-ordinator Jennifer Brownie said comparisons on the Australian Energy Regulator's website, Energy Made Easy, highlighted the differences.



The cheapest deal, without discounts, available for a four-person family in the Brisbane suburb of Coorparoo with an annual consumption of 6970

kWh was \$1962. But a four-person household in Cairns with the same use on government-owned Ergon Energy's main residential tariff (tariff 11) would fork out \$2335 a year, \$373 more.

The effect on a small business was even greater with a firm in Cairns using 6853 kWh on tariff 20 paying \$2573 a year, or \$633 more than an equivalent business in the Brisbane suburbs.

"On top of this, power bill pain is made much greater in regional Queensland due to

the need to use airconditioning during summer," Ms Brownie said.

While almost 20 electricity retailers compete for customers in southeast Queensland, most regional consumers are supplied by the government-owned Ergon Energy.

"In the last two years the Queensland Government increased power bills in regional Queensland by more than 6 per cent for homes and a massive 15 per cent or more for regional businesses," Ms Brownie said.

"The Queensland Government is using the power bills of regional Queenslanders and the ownership of Queensland's electricity assets as a tax and this has to stop."

The pressure of electricity bills was forcing companies to shed jobs, the group claimed.

An Energy Queensland spokesman said: "It is difficult to compare regulated prices offered in regional Queensland to market contracts offered in southeast Queensland without understanding the conditions of specific market contracts."



LIGHTS OUT: Luke Jonsson, son of business owner Warren Jonsson, is concerned about the effect of rising electricity prices.

Picture: JUSTIN BRIERTY

Power shock driving businesses to cut staff

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FAR North cattle producer and business owner Warren Jonsson has been forced to consider cuts after experiencing the stress and struggles of rising power prices.

Since opening Jonsson's

Farm Market in Cairns five years ago, he's experienced about a 170 per cent increase in electricity prices.

He said he'd been forced to increase the price of products, such as fresh fruit and vegetables just to get by.

"I've got a \$5000 bill a week on irrigation and refrigeration

and half-million dollar electricity bill a year," he said. "As retailers and producers we have to try pass those costs on to the consumer ... but the cost of living has become unbearable and a lot of businesses and families just can't afford it.

"We're ... looking at where we can cut costs."

A recent survey shows that regional Queensland is being charged up to 20 per cent more than in Brisbane, and businesses up to 30 per cent more.

"The thing that annoys me is that the State Government is making a profit out of essential services like water and power," Mr Jonsson said.

Co-ordinator of the Queensland Electricity Users Network, Jennifer Brownie, said the price of power "should be no more than is needed to provide the essential service".

"If power prices don't go down business can't survive any more ... we're at a tipping point."