



Heat on gas network

Workers can't meet demand

MICHAEL STEDMAN

SOARING power prices have reignited demand for connections to natural gas.

After years of a less than enthusiastic take-up, gas utility Tas Gas Networks now cannot keep up with the requests.

Customers face a three-month wait for a gas connection to their homes.

More than 400 people have applied for a connection in the past two months — taking the total number of connections to the network to 6700.

That is still a fraction of the 43,000 homes that the gas main passes, but Tas Gas Networks general manager Richard Sheather said the take-up was encouraging.

Aurora has applied to lift power prices by 7 per cent for households and more than 15 per cent for business customers.

Tasmanians are already paying 20 per cent more for power since the January increases last year.

"Electricity price rises have meant natural gas is heading towards a third of the price of standard tariffs," Mr Sheather said.

"In the last two months we have had well over 400 people apply to get connected — that is a significant increase on what we have seen in past."

Mr Sheather said his team of 30 contractors were struggling to keep up with the demand.

It takes a crew of three a day to connect natural gas pipe to a home.

Gas fitters, who did not want to be named, said the long waits were turning potential customers away.

"I know a lady who was quoted in February and they only made the connection last Friday," one fitter said.

"It is not good enough and that might put people off going for gas."

Suppliers have also questioned why the network is not being extended into growth areas such as Brighton, Kingston and the Eastern Shore where pipes could easily be installed in new subdivisions.

Mr Sheather said there were no plans to extend the network without financial assistance from the State Government.

"We still have in excess of 36,000 homes that can get access and we are going to

focus on getting those people connected," Mr Sheather said.

He said Tas Gas would consider extending the network for hotels and industry but there were no plans go into residential areas.

During Budget estimates hearings Treasurer Michael Aird said there were no plans to provide more public funds for the rollout.



FLAT OUT: Richard Sheather