

ASIAN RENEWABLE ENERGY HUB

**269. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's investment in establishing Western Australia as a world leader in renewable hydrogen and creating new jobs in this emerging industry.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what this government's response has been to the decision by federal Liberal minister Sussan Ley to reject the Asian Renewable Energy Hub?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house what this project will mean for jobs, businesses and industry in the Pilbara?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I would like to thank the member for the question and her ongoing interest and expertise in the area of energy.

- (1)–(2) We are all excited about the jobs that will be created and the expansion of new industries in the renewable energy sector. Whether it is for the generation, manufacture or export of hydrogen in the future, the future energy focus is the future for the Western Australian economy. We are excited about the changes in our energy and resources industry and what they will mean for the ongoing diversification of the Western Australian economy. We are excited about projects such as the Asian Renewable Energy Hub, which is tipped to be a world leader in green hydrogen production, particularly as we move responsibly towards a decarbonised economy. We are most excited about the potential for projects such as these to transform the Pilbara economy and to create over 5 000 jobs in construction and 3 000 jobs in its operation over the life of the project. There is one government that is not as excited as we are about this project. It is disappointing to see the federal government is not so excited about this project, particularly when it appears to have supported it thus far.

In October 2020, the first 15-gigawatt stage of the project received state government environmental approval. In December 2020, the federal government granted it major project status and conditionally approved the first stage under the commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. At that stage, the project was going okay. After receiving approval for stage 1, the proponents submitted their expanded 26-gigawatt exciting second stage to the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority and, only last month, the public consultation period commenced and they expanded the second stage under the commonwealth EPBC act with the understanding that the state environmental assessment was already underway.

I must confess that I am disappointed—I know the Minister for Hydrogen Industry in the other place is also disappointed—that the commonwealth government has decided to reject the second stage before any due process has been undertaken. Strangely, the federal Minister for the Environment leapt out of the box with a determination that the revised proposal was “clearly unacceptable”, despite the fact that the decision had clearly occurred without meaningful engagement with the commonwealth, the proponent or the government of Western Australia. It is bizarre that the commonwealth government is now turning its back on the new energy future. It is bizarre that it has almost unilaterally rejected this proposal and it is bizarre that after all the twisting and turning that it undertook in Queensland to drag the Adani coal project almost dying across the finish line, that today it would, without due process and without any meaningful engagement with the proponent, simply reject the second stage of what will be Australia's largest green hydrogen project and a flag-bearer for the energy future of Western Australia.

Perhaps the commonwealth Minister for the Environment had half an eye on the Nationals in Canberra and realised that the climate change wars are not over yet. Maybe she was anticipating Barnaby Joyce coming back into the fold, and is understanding that we do not need to take on a green energy future, investing in renewable hydrogen, making sure that we are creating the jobs of future and making sure that Australia is a leader in new energy proposals and is allowing Barnaby and the National Party to drag us back into the dark ages of coal, climate change denial and taking Western Australia's economic future backwards.

It is bizarre the way in which the commonwealth environment minister so quickly rejected out of hand this proposal that represents a significant and exciting future for a decarbonised WA economy. Only last month, the federal budget had in it an interesting funding commitment around hydrogen—\$275.5 million towards developing four more hydrogen production hubs, with potential sites including the Pilbara in Western Australia. What is going on? What is going on in the heads of those opposite? What is going on with the commonwealth government? Clearly, they are not prepared to embrace the future. Clearly, they are not prepared to back the WA McGowan government's commitment to renewable hydrogen and, clearly, the climate wars are not over yet. Barnaby and the National Party are dragging us back, but we will resist and the McGowan Labor government will take Western Australia forward as part of our green energy vision for WA.