

EXPORTS, JUNE QUARTER

29. Mr SWEETMAN to the Premier:

Western Australia's export performance has been very strong this year with the growth of exports in the first quarter reaching record levels. Have the trade figures for the June quarter been analysed and released yet?

Mr COURT replied:

The export figures for the first half of this year have been quite outstanding. During the June quarter the exports grew by 54.7 per cent compared with the same quarter last year, and that followed the first quarter growth of some 47.8 per cent. The value of those exports for the June quarter this year is \$2.5b higher than for the corresponding quarter last year. Therefore, it was an outstanding performance at a time when we were coming out of a period when our exporters were experiencing difficulties with the Asian downturn. They were able to survive those difficult times. Now, with stronger markets and stronger commodity prices, the June figures reflect this State's tremendous export performance.

The increase has not been driven simply by changes in Asia, although the Japanese growth, for example, was in excess of 70 per cent; our growth into markets like the United States and Europe has also been very strong. Western Australia's trade surplus is the largest in this nation and that is why it is absolutely critical that our industry is able to continue to be the competitive exporter that it is.

I want to read from a media release by Ian Satchwell from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, in which he was talking about the threat of having the workplace agreements legislation repealed -

To throw Workplace Agreements out in favour of a return to collective bargaining would be like putting a ball and chain around the industry's leg – it would stop the progress of companies that provide over 20% of Australia's exports and 75% of Western Australia's exports.

When members opposite are looking at policy changes, they must not put at risk the competitiveness of our export industries which are so important not only to this State but to the nation; and they should not go out publicly saying that the Leader of the Opposition can announce changes to his policies when he knows that his policies are set from within his own organisation.

Mr Kobelke: Who sets your policies?

Mr COURT: I was wondering how long it would take the member for Nollamara to interject; I think I have just won a bet.

Policy within the Australian Labor Party is not made by directives from the leadership but by resolutions originating from branches, affiliated unions and individual party members. Therefore, members opposite should not go around publicly saying that they will have certain policies on workplace agreements when they know they will do what they are directed to do.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr COURT: The workplace is changing. People in the workplace are demanding more flexibility in their working arrangements. I was briefed by someone at a bank the other day who said that people have been surprised at the changes taking place within that bank and the number of people who are now able to effectively work from home to carry out their very important responsibilities within that bank. I repeat that this State's export performance has been outstanding and the last thing we want is for that performance to be put at risk.