

PORT INFRASTRUCTURE

524. Mr K.J.J. MICHEL to the Minister for Ports:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to expand and build on the capacity of Western Australian ports.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's investment in port infrastructure is allowing record levels of export pretty clearly in the Pilbara?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this government's strong management of Western Australian ports is powering the nation's economy?

Mr D.R. MICHAEL replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(2) It is great to advise the house on the continued success of Pilbara ports. I am sure members will be aware of the incredible importance of the ports under the Pilbara Ports Authority in Port Hedland, Dampier and Ashburton, especially, and the activity that happens at these ports and how critical it is for both our state's and our country's economy. During the pandemic, Australia depended on Western Australian ports and its customers to maintain export activity and the flow of royalties and revenue to our economy. This was no small feat, given the global impacts of the pandemic on shipping and supply chain management. Since 2020, the Pilbara Ports Authority has seen record volumes of export commodities through its ports. The majority has been iron ore but there are also a significant exports of other commodities, including other minerals and liquefied natural gas, which generate vital income for the country, the state and the Pilbara region.

During the 2020–21 financial year, total Pilbara ports throughput volumes exceeded 720 million tonnes for the first time. In 2021–22, this grew to 733 million tonnes. Today I report that last financial year there was a further three per cent increase to a record 752 million tonnes exported through Pilbara ports. The value of the goods handled by Pilbara ports is now estimated at \$164 billion, which is an incredible number. Pilbara ports handles nearly all Australia's iron ore exports. In fact—this statistic is unbelievable—they account for almost 44 per cent of the world's total seaborne iron ore trade, most of that coming out of Port Hedland. To give an indication of the scale of this task, that is over 200 million tonnes of product a day. The ports continue to provide a reliable, flexible and consistent service to their customers despite the complexity, tidal restrictions and frequent weather interruptions, especially in the wet season. There is an average of 48 vessel movements a day, carrying up to 200 000 tonnes each. The port of Port Hedland is the busiest of Pilbara ports, and responsible last year for 566 million tonnes of exports alone.

I was recently able to visit the Town of Port Hedland with the member and Premier Cook. We took the opportunity to observe the passage of ships through the channel from the Pilbara Ports Authority control tower, which was an unbelievable sight. The whole operation is carefully managed with what I thought was a pretty modest team, with the cooperation of port users, coordinated by the port authority's harbourmaster so that the absolute maximum volume of shipping can be supported. The shipping movements are so tightly managed that the gap between the hull of the ship and the channel bottom can be as little as the length of a mobile phone, which is absolutely unbelievable. Unlike other states, Western Australia has maintained public ownership of the port authorities, something that we know the Liberal Party tried to chip away at the end of its last term. Thankfully, that was not able to happen.

The successful operation of the Pilbara Ports Authority is continuing to break throughput records in close partnership with the private sector, its customers and terminal operators. I thank and congratulate the Pilbara Ports Authority, its customers and especially all those workers who had a part in breaking another record and for their contribution to Western Australia's and Australia's economies.