

NICKEL INDUSTRY

38. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade:

I refer to the announcement today by BHP that it is closing its Kambalda nickel concentrator and reviewing the rest of its operations with a view to potential closure. It indicated that the closure of the nickel business will result in the loss of more than 2 500 direct jobs and a further 7 500 associated jobs. This announcement follows the closure of BP's Kwinana oil refinery in 2021 and the January announcement that Alcoa will shut its Kwinana alumina refinery this year.

- (1) What is the government doing to prevent the shutdown of BHP's nickel business in Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister explain why the recent highly publicised nickel round table with federal minister Madeleine King has obviously been a complete failure in supporting this critical industry?

The SPEAKER: Just before I give you the call, Premier, there has been a bit of a tendency of late to have incredibly long preambles to questions. That is not to say that you could not have got all that information out in question form. A couple of those earlier bits of information could have been put in the first question—for example, "Are you aware that BHP has done"—rather than in your own assertions. I ask you to be mindful of that. Questions should be direct and should not have a long story ahead them. That is more suited when raising a grievance or in another form of debate.

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) If we strip away the hyperbole, opinion and, quite frankly, the BS, from that question, it essentially comes down to the issue of —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: We are continuing to talk with the industry about how we can back it up, but the issues confronting the nickel industry at the moment are global and structural and, as a result, they require significant effort by all levels of government to make sure that we get the right levels of support and the right supports in the right places. This will obviously be an important piece of work. BHP is confronting a massive challenge to the global industry. It is a structural issue, and it is one that we obviously take very seriously, particularly given, as the member observed, that this involves a number of Western Australian jobs. The member for Cottesloe tried to pile in all these other issues by saying that somehow BP's decision to create a biofuels facility and a renewable hydrogen facility at Kwinana is apparently a bad thing. BP recognises that we are all part of a global energy transition. It is bringing that to Western Australia, yet the member for Cottesloe said that that is a bad thing. That is how much he is rooted in the past.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: He has also never explained in this place why, when he was the head of Alcoa's refinery in Kwinana, he did not upgrade the facilities with new technology so that it could withstand the challenges of that industry. He has never declared his hand in relation to the ultimate challenges that that refinery is facing. We are used to him coming in here and regretting his past, and, now, unfortunately, he is here to regret his future.

We will continue to work with industry and government to ensure that we stand by the industry. We know that the federal government will do so too, which is the reason Hon Madeleine King sat down with industry to discuss its challenges—so that she can work with her colleagues in the federal government to craft the policies that will support the industry. It is great that we have a minister like Minister King who is prepared to do that—to sit down with industry and have these conversations. We will continue to make sure that we work with industry, other governments, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and directly with BHP and the nickel miners to ensure that they understand that we have their back.