

HYDROGEN HUB — OAKAJEE

**146. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Premier:**

I refer to the series of press releases from the government about the development of an energy hub at Oakajee, including the 18 September 2020 release about seeking expressions of interest internationally for renewable hydrogen projects and the release dated December 2022 regarding a trilateral study for the Oakajee strategic industrial area.

- (1) Can the Premier explain the lack of any tangible progress at Oakajee after six years of government and despite the allocation of land for six proponents?
- (2) What have interested parties told the government about what is needed to move Oakajee from a conversation piece to a real industrial hub for renewable energy-based industry at Oakajee?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

- (1)–(2) Oakajee has a long history. I do not know whether members know where it is; it is about 25 kilometres north of Geraldton. It has access for a deepwater port.

**Mr R.S. Love:** It's just out of Geraldton.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Leader of the Opposition probably does not understand the history of it. I just think he should understand —

**Mr R.S. Love:** I do understand.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I actually do not think you do.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! One person asked this question; one person is answering it, please.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It goes back some years. It was identified decades ago as a potential deepwater port north of Geraldton, principally in relation to what are called BIFs, banded ironstone formations, in the midwest and particularly inland for some of the iron ore projects. A lot of the iron ore that is mined there now goes out through the port of Geraldton, principally because the Labor government of Geoff Gallop deepened the harbour, allowing for the export of iron ore in greater quantities through Geraldton. It removed the rail line from the waterfront and put in the southern transport corridor. That Labor government did all those things for Geraldton. It was the greatest government for Geraldton—maybe the second greatest for Geraldton! It did a great job for Geraldton. We are spending \$350 million or thereabouts on improving the port again and a range of other projects in Geraldton to allow for greater capacity for exports.

Oakajee was identified as a port. There is a project called Kingstream. We passed legislation in this house back in the late 1990s, maybe 1997. Its progenitor, if you like, was a man by the name of Ken Court. He was the driving force behind the Kingstream An Feng development, as I think it was called. That obviously did not really amount to anything. Then there was a whole range of other proposals for Oakajee and a competitive process for the site, actually, between a Chinese company and a Japanese company. A company called Oakajee Port and Rail was successful in that in 2007–08, perhaps in 2008. Again, under the last Liberal–National government that did not go anywhere either.

Now, the idea behind it is as one of the hydrogen hubs, as we so term them. One is in the Pilbara, one is in Kwinana and one is at Oakajee. We have allocated, from memory, around \$150 million or \$170 million towards these hubs. Oakajee, as I recall, has around \$70 million or so allocated towards the project. That is something that we are working on with various proponents and so forth. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum is currently in Japan promoting it. I was in Japan and Korea recently promoting it. There is a lot of interest in it. But renewable hydrogen and ammonia are difficult industries. They do not happen overnight. There are a lot of transport issues. As far as I am aware, we are about to become biggest exporter of renewable hydrogen in the world, through the Pilbara with the Yuri project, which is being worked up with a 10-megawatt electrolyser as we speak.

The Oakajee project is one on which we are working with proponents and we are looking at what infrastructure needs to be put in place. We have an allocation of state money towards it, and we will continue to do so. The idea that somehow these things just magic out of the air overnight is unrealistic. That somehow they just happen overnight when transport solutions and technology and overseas markets have not yet been resolved is fanciful. It is just fanciful and shows a level of misunderstanding of how industry works that is really quite breathtaking.