

JOBS — LOCAL INDUSTRIES — GOLDFIELDS–ESPERANCE

199. Ms A.E. KENT to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to the Cook Labor government’s commitment to supporting the creation of local jobs for Western Australians.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the new Mt Holland lithium mine will provide job and economic opportunities in the goldfields–Esperance region?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how the establishment of this mine has been supported through targeted investment by this government?

Mr D.R. MICHAEL replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question and for her continued advocacy for the resources industry in Western Australia. Obviously, the member asked about Mt Holland as it is not too far away from her electorate boundary, so I thank her for the question.

It was a pleasure to be there on 7 March when I attended, with the Premier and Deputy Premier, the opening of the Mt Holland lithium mine. It is a mine and a concentrator, and it is a joint venture between a Western Australian company we all know, Wesfarmers, and Sociedad Quimica y Minera de Chile—SQM. The mine is known as Covalent Lithium. Mt Holland, which is 110 kilometres south east of Southern Cross in the Shire of Yilgarn, will make a significant contribution to Western Australia through the planned production of 380 000 tonnes of spodumene concentrate each year, which will be refined into 50 000 tonnes of battery-quality lithium hydroxide. That is enough to power one million electric vehicles. We all know that worldwide demand for electric vehicles will continue as the years progress and as the world decarbonises.

In line with the state’s battery and critical minerals strategy, which encourages downstream processing in our state, Covalent expects to deliver its first lithium hydroxide in early 2025 from its refinery at the Kwinana industrial area. This new project will further boost Western Australia’s battery and critical mineral credentials and emphasises the crucial role our state is playing in global decarbonisation efforts.

It was really good to be at that mine. We had a great tour of its facilities, and we heard some of the history of that mine. We met some of the very professional workers who are doing that responsibly sourced lithium mining and production. We saw the quality of the technology and innovation on display at another Western Australian mine site. It was my first mine opening in my life, so I was very, very pleased to be there. I have now done two, but I will talk about that when we come back in the next sitting.

I note, and the Premier mentioned before, that today’s Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force data highlights that over 26 000 jobs, as we have just heard, have been created in Western Australia in the past month alone. That takes it to more than 300 000 jobs since 2017, when this Labor government came to power. To this end, more than 1 000 jobs were created during construction of the Mt Holland lithium project, with 350 jobs expected during operations on the Kalamaia Kalarku Kaprun people’s country of Marlinyi and Ghoorlie trees.

I congratulate both Wesfarmers and SQM for committing to this multibillion-dollar investment in Western Australia, which will go for decades. Of course, like all projects in Western Australia, the Cook government played a key role in enabling this project by committing \$60 million to upgrade the Moorine Rock to Mt Holland road, which has improved road safety and freight efficiency, to support the future growth of the mine. Western Australia is of course the largest producer of lithium in the world. Lithium became the state’s second most valuable mineral in 2022–23, with sales of \$20 billion and royalties of \$930 million. Western Australia remains a globally significant battery and critical minerals processing hub, and we are working hard to do all we can to further capitalise on this incredible opportunity.