

GERALDTON PORT - CAPACITY

Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

- (1) Given that the deepening of the Geraldton port was completed in 2003, and in recent times there have been up to nine vessels waiting at the Geraldton harbour, why has the capacity of the port not been dealt with prior to now?
- (2) What is the government's immediate response and strategy to alleviate further demurrage charges, given the negative impact on the viability of future and existing mining projects due to the hampering of cash flow, and the impact on the mid-west's reputation as a reliable exporter and manager of developing industry?
- (3) Can the minister list the likely bottlenecks in the Geraldton port system and the government's strategy to eliminate them?

Hon ADELE FARINA replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1)-(3) The member is correct in pointing out that, after years of neglect by the previous government, the Labor government took on the Geraldton port enhancement project and completed it in November 2003, at a cost of \$101 million. This decisive action enabled the iron ore operations of the mid-west to come into play. The government did not rest on its laurels. As iron ore demand has grown, it has continued to upgrade the capacities of the port. In 2004-05, \$4 million was spent on reconditioning the berth 4 conveyors, relocating Luzenac talc and improving the mobile ship-loader for berth 6. In 2006, the state government committed to the \$47.5 million upgrade of berth 5 as a dedicated iron ore facility. This will be completed this year and will eliminate delays to provide faster shipping turnaround times than previously seen. Berth efficiency will be significantly improved by the fourth quarter of 2007 with the commissioning of a dedicated berth 4 mineral sand circuit. This will substantially separate the iron ore and mineral sand ship-loading operations and reduce the time it takes to prepare the berth for mineral sands following iron ore or concentrate operations. Currently, this requires a wash down and inspection that can take up to 36 hours. From the fourth quarter of 2007, this time will be reduced to approximately six hours.