

FUTURE BATTERY AND CRITICAL MINERALS SECTOR

215. Ms R.S. STEPHENS to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to developing Western Australia's battery and critical mineral sector.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's partnership with Korean trading partners is building capacity in Western Australia's critical mining sector?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this partnership will help drive further innovation in WA's mining industry?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:

I am very pleased to answer this question from the outstanding member for Albany.

- (1)–(2) I just remind people that the south west of Western Australia is actually a major mining province in Western Australia with many jobs and opportunities flowing from that. It includes, of course, downstream processing like the Albemarle processing facility in Kemerton that takes feedstock from the world's number one lithium mine at Greenbushes. It is very important that we engage with our trading partners like Korea. We have had a future battery and critical minerals industries strategy in Western Australia since 2019 that has seen a multibillion-dollar investment in our downstream processing industry.

During my recent trip that included a visit to Korea, a visit that was opposed by the Liberal Party, I was able to witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Minerals Research Institute of Western Australia and the Korean Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources, the equivalent body for the Korean government. This will enhance technological exchange between Western Australia and Korea while we work on improving our ability to find minerals, recover them from the earth, process them at the mine site and work on those extracted minerals to make the chemicals that are needed for our battery industry and to process rare earths as well. It will also allow for research on extracting critical minerals from tailings—that is, the material that currently goes to waste. Interestingly, that is demonstrated by Iluka Resources' rare-earth plant at Eneabba, north of Perth, which is going to take mine tailings and reprocess it to create rare earths. It will be an integrated rare-earth facility.

Western Australia has already achieved a great deal. One of the advantages of my travel was that I was able to let our international partners know of the great success that we have already had in midstream processing, not just our strong position in mining, and now our globally significant investments into the processing of those minerals into chemical products for industry around the world. This MOU with the Korean Institute will allow us to continue to develop the technologies that we need to create the high-paid, high-skilled jobs in Western Australia that the Labor government wants to see here.

I understand that the opposition, the Liberal Party in particular, does not want to engage with our trading partners. It criticises me, the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, for doing my job and —

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: — visiting our trading partners and the key investors making Western Australian industry so strong, but I do not shy away from hard work and I am prepared to do that again. This MOU will assist us in transferring the technologies that we need to grow our industry in Western Australia.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition with the last question.