

KIMBERLEY FLOODS — TRANSPORT LINKS

125. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the devastation caused by the Kimberley flood event and ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. Can the minister update the house on the interim measures this government has put in place to ensure that people in flood-affected communities can stay connected and essential freight and supplies can be provided, and can the minister advise the house how the government is progressing with the long-term recovery across the region?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for Geraldton for that question. I also want to recognise the strong advocacy of the member for Kimberley. On behalf of the house, we all extend our condolences to the member for Kimberley on her recent loss.

As we know, the Kimberley floods had a devastating impact in that region. We have been working very hard with the community and of course with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to get the reconnections

happening. It is a challenging time. It is a challenging area with variable water flows, and, of course, we are trying to address all these challenges during the wet season.

Two weeks ago, the Premier and I visited the Great Northern Highway at Willare to inspect the works that had been completed to allow for that road to reopen. In just 24 days, the workers employed by Main Roads and the contractors in that region had that road reopened. It is now open 24/7 in both directions. Over 50 000 tonnes of material were used, with 55 items of plant and 90 workers at the site. There were 24 local businesses engaged and 14 per cent of them were Aboriginal businesses. That reopening allowed for the vital connection to be re-established and gave a sense of relief to those in Fitzroy Crossing and in Derby. I again thank all the workers for the work they undertook.

We now have and will soon be signing a contract with the Georgiou Group and BMD Constructions for the construction of the new Fitzroy River Bridge. We undertook a tender process that would normally take about a year. We did that in about three weeks. We have now established the preferred contractors and we will be signing the contract very soon for the construction of the new Fitzroy River Bridge. We know that, again, this one will be challenging. We are now doing forward works in looking at the design of the bridge, but we know that this reconnection is vital for not only Fitzroy Crossing, but also the entire Kimberley and north west.

Yesterday, the new ferry services started to operate across the Fitzroy River, and the new barge services are operating and taking the community back and forward for the first time in that area. That barge service was, again, something that we put in place to ensure that there is connectivity. We will continue to work in particular in relation to the water levels in the river to make sure that we can operate that barge effectively and safely and look at expanding it from transporting people to other freight and other connections.

We will also be commencing work on construction of the new low-level river crossings in the next month. Again, pending water flows, this new low-level crossing will allow for connectivity in the dry season. It very much addresses many of the concerns that have been expressed by key industry groups like the pastoralists to make sure that we have connections in the dry season to be able to move freight in that entire area.

As members can see, there has been a lot happening. I want to thank the crew who have been working up north. I want to thank the member for Kimberley for her work liaising with the community members, and my colleagues, in particular the Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Stephen Dawson, who are working together to try to address all the outstanding issues.

Of course, this is one of the issues the Premier alluded to. One of the members in the other house, Hon Neil Thomson, reckons we need a royal commission into the floods in the Kimberley.

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Why did it rain so much! I do not know why we would need to do that. As members can see, we are out there delivering practical solutions on the ground. We could run a royal commission that spends millions of dollars and distracts us from the task at hand, which is getting those connections in place and making sure that the community is once again connected.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister!