

INVESTMENT AND TRADE COMMISSIONER FOR ASEAN

582. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's upcoming trip to Indonesia and note the decision by the WA Labor government to no longer have a dedicated trade commissioner for Indonesia, instead spreading that role thin across countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and having it based in Singapore.

- (1) Is the government reconsidering a permanent and experienced in-country commissioner to be based in Jakarta focused solely on Indonesia?
- (2) Will this help Western Australia build and improve partnerships in critical minerals, agriculture, education and other important economic, trade and investment opportunities for WA?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) We saw what a debacle some of our trade commission offices were under the previous government. Those activities that occurred overseas, some of them at the hands of a Liberal member of Parliament, were quite frankly embarrassing and did us reputational damage. They frankly needed addressing. The WA Labor government undertook a review of our overseas trade offices to make sure that we drive value for money for the WA taxpayer, drive a strategic approach in our regional economies and drive dollars to Western Australian businesses so they can drive jobs for Western Australians. As a result, we settled on the creation of a hub-and-spoke model around the United Kingdom and Europe, India and the Gulf region, the ASEAN region, North Asia, China and, latterly, the Americas. Via this process, we can have teams right around the region ensuring we can be in the right place at the right time. For instance, we have an Agent General in London, but under this government that Agent General now has an office in Frankfurt as well. We have an ASEAN trade commissioner in the ASEAN region, but because of the hub-and-spoke model, that person is not necessarily anchored in a single place. They can have teams working around the region. Our government has also opened an office in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Having a trade commissioner dedicated to the Americas means that we have now opened our office in Austin. Our government continues to expand its influence.

There was a reason that the Investment and Trade Commissioner for ASEAN region was no longer based in Singapore; it is called COVID. It was simply too dangerous to have someone employed in the Singaporean office because of that area's struggles with COVID. The Investment and Trade Commissioner for ASEAN will be based in Jakarta. The acting trade commissioner is currently in Jakarta, but that does not mean that Singapore is not important, and we do not have people working there. This is one of the lessons that we have learned from other states with a very aggressive overseas trade network, particularly Victoria. The message for everyone is that if we want to be globally competitive, we have to be in the game. We have to have an extensive network of offices right around the world and in our strategic markets to ensure we can drive these particular outcomes. We saw what happened under the previous government. It lost track of it, it lost control of our trade offices and, quite frankly, it was a debacle!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: Sorry, Madam Speaker; I forgot that we have just opened up the Manilla office as well, so that is fresh off the press.

Our trade offices are doing an extraordinary job at the moment because we have reinvented the system. We have young, driven and strategic trade commissioners working in those regions to drive business to Western Australian companies and to build those relationships. If members want see the most significant indication of how effective our trade and investment strategy is, just look at the number of businesses that want to come on the Indonesian trip. Over 130 business leaders want to be part of our trade mission to Indonesia. That is a vote of confidence. They know that the Western Australian government is firmly focused on engagement with Asia, on driving trade to Western Australia and on creating great quality trade jobs for Western Australians.