

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [3.08 pm]: When I finished my contribution to the Address-in-Reply last week, I was talking about Tanami Road. One could say it has been one of my hobbyhorses, and it will continue to be so while I am a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region. I had explained that it is a major route that goes just north of Alice Springs and across to just south of Halls Creek, but it basically links the Kimberley region back through to the eastern states and cuts some 1 100 kilometres off the distance from, say, Adelaide or Melbourne up to the Kimberley. It even cuts some 270 kilometres off the trip from Kununurra back through as well. I will talk about Kununurra a bit later in my speech, but obviously the investment that we have put into Kununurra and the expected development there is extremely important.

The need for Tanami Road to be sealed has been taken up very strongly by the Shire of Halls Creek. The Central Kimberley Chamber of Commerce is also taking a very proactive role. A very smart young lady by the name of Lara Wilde has recently taken on the role of economic development officer at the Shire of Halls Creek and is very much pushing this issue, not only through the federal government and the state government, but also through the local government at which she is employed. The Shire of Halls Creek can see the benefits for the town of Halls Creek from the sealing of this road. But there are other benefits as well.

It may interest members to know that 308 kilometres of the Western Australian section of this road is unsealed. The Northern Territory section of this road is 514 kilometres long, and only 321 kilometres is unsealed. So the Northern Territory has been very active and has sealed 193 kilometres of this road.

One of the issues is that this road is classed by Main Roads as a local road, and because the surface of the road is so rough, not a lot of vehicles use it. Therefore, the traffic counts that are done by Main Roads do not show what the potential use of this road could be. I am told that as soon as this local road is graded, truck drivers in particular will rush to use it because it will significantly shorten the distance they have to drive. It will also shorten the time that it takes drivers to cover this distance, because when the road surface is severely corrugated, as it is regularly, people cannot drive at the normal speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour but have to drive at only 60 kilometres an hour.

The sealing of this road will benefit the pastoral industries in this area. It will also open up for tourism the Aboriginal communities of Balgo, Billiluna and Mulan. Balgo is, of course, famous for its art. Many people fly from Sydney to Balgo to buy art from that community. This would open up a whole avenue of tourism for that part of the state.

The sealing of this road would also be advantageous from a defence point of view. It would shorten the number of kilometres that people have to drive to get to the detention centre at the former Curtin air base at Derby. At present quite a number of boat people are housed at that detention centre. We do not hear a lot about them; they are obviously fairly happy there. Last year, that detention centre was worth some \$186 million to the Shire of Derby. The defence of the Kimberley region, with all the oil and gas infrastructure that is going in there, is very important.

The reports and cost benefit analyses that have been done on the sealing of this road show that it will be very beneficial. However, it is very expensive to construct a road to the standard that is required by Main Roads. The advantage of local government being involved in this project, with Lara Wilde certainly pushing it, with her shire behind her, and with the regional chamber of commerce, is that they will be able to utilise local labour, and that will provide employment opportunities for many of the unemployed people in Halls Creek and the East Kimberley region.

To get back to the tourism potential, I have mentioned Wolf Creek crater and the Bungle Bungles. Everyone thinks they belong to Kununurra, but they do not; they are close to Halls Creek. If members have not been to Wolf Creek crater, I can tell them that it is pretty special.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon KEN BASTON: Has Hon Ken Travers been there?

Hon Ken Travers: Not after the movie!

Hon KEN BASTON: If Hon Ken Travers has seen the movie and he does go out there, I can tell him that it is a little eerie. Wolf Creek crater is 850 metres across. When people arrive at the crater, they think it looks like

normal spinifex country. But when they walk up to the top of the crater, they find that the breeze almost whistles as it blows across the crater.

Hon Ken Travers: And John Jarratt comes out of the bushes, and that is when you really panic!

Hon KEN BASTON: If members have seen the movie, they will know that it is a great tourism attraction, yet it is not promoted at all.

Hon Ken Travers: It is on my bucket list, I have to tell you. It is somewhere I do want to go one day.

Hon KEN BASTON: Good. It is 130-odd kilometres from Halls Creek, I think. The member can visit there in July; I would be pleased to see it.

Tanami Road is a very important road. We have only two sealed highways across the top and bottom of Australia. One is through Katherine and then down south, and the other is through the Nullarbor. Tanami Road will open up the opportunity to develop housing in the north of the state. That has always been a big issue. I think I have said before in a speech in this place that I have seen transportable housing in Newman that was built in Victoria, because it was cheaper to build it in Victoria and cart it to Western Australia than it was to build it in Western Australia. The sealing of this road would open up opportunities to provide housing in the north of the state.

At the beginning of my term in Parliament, I have been very honoured to take on the role of Minister for Agriculture and Food. Having lived on the land for much of my life, I have a little understanding of some of the hardships and challenges that are faced by primary producers. I also understand the connection that people feel towards their property and their way of life, and the difficulty they have in distinguishing between their property as a way of life, and their property as a business, which is what it is. In the 30-odd years that I was on a pastoral lease, I always made sure that every three months I would leave to have a break in the city. My reason for doing that was that at the end of three months, I started to fall in love with my property, so that was the time to go back to the city and realise that I had a business to run and it was the business that I was there for.

I would not be truthful if I did not say that I have not had an easy start as Minister for Agriculture and Food, because the eastern wheatbelt has suffered from not just drought but a couple of frosts in a row. It is pretty tough for farmers to lose their crop. I have not experienced a frost, but I believe that farmers can have a magnificent crop one day, and the next day they wake up and they have lost the lot.

I can say that despite all the negativity about agriculture that we see in the press, some really good stories are happening in agriculture in Western Australia. I have noted down some of these good stories, because I believe that the house should be aware of what agriculture in Western Australia is worth a year. In the calendar year 2012, agriculture was worth some \$5.4 billion. That was an increase of 21 per cent on the previous year. Western Australia accounts for 60 per cent of Australia's wheat exports and between 40 and 50 per cent of Australia's barley exports. In the calendar year 2012, wheat exports were worth \$2.5 billion, and in the calendar 2011 they were worth \$1.7 billion. So there was a good increase between the calendar year 2011 and the calendar year 2012. The top markets for the calendar year once again were China and Hong Kong, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan. Exports to China and Indonesia grew significantly, mainly due to improved wheat exports. Exports to China went from \$67 million to \$370 million, and exports to Indonesia went from \$192 million to \$556 million. For the Philippines, the increase was quite amazing; it went from \$1.5 million to \$200 million. That is an incredible increase, from \$1.5 million to \$200 million. One of the exports that is probably more dear to everyone's heart, or it certainly is to mine, is wine. In 2010, it was valued at some \$33 million; in 2012, it had increased to some \$45 million, and 50 per cent of that went to China. Exports of canola to Pakistan grew from \$8 million to \$130 million—this is all out of Western Australia for agriculture. Cereal hay exports to South Korea went from \$2 million to \$27 million. As I said, we keep seeing in the newspaper the bad stories, but there are lots of good stories.

Going on a little further, the live cattle export industry fluctuated, of course, and we all know what happened to it in 2011, I think it was, when it was stopped dead in its tracks by a reactive minister who had a rush of blood. Of course, the live cattle export industry suffered. However, in 2004–05, exports were around \$174 million, and in 2010–11, they were \$245 million. Our exports to Indonesia are down, and they are now about half what we had before the ban. The value of live sheep exports increased from \$177 million to \$267 million in that period I was talking about—that is, from 2004–05 to 2010–11.

One of the more exciting exports is vegetables. Western Australia is the leading Australian state for vegetable exports. Interestingly enough—I must admit that I did not know anything about this until I got this job, of course, and I found it very interesting—our main export is carrots; they are at the top of our list. In 2010, the United Arab Emirates took 16 000 tonnes of carrots, and at the same time Singapore took 12 000 tonnes of carrots. It is very good to see that Hon Nigel Hallett enjoys gaining the knowledge that I am portraying to him. He could end up becoming a carrot farmer when he retires, after I have given away these valuable statistics.

Interestingly enough, strawberries still remain Western Australia's highest value fruit export, accounting for 60 per cent of Australia's strawberry exports. Once again, Western Australia is very forward in this area. I mentioned the other day in debate on a motion that I had met with the loose-leaf lettuce growers in Wanneroo. That is a success story in itself. They started with 10 acres, and now they have 100 acres and 40 employees. They have four crops of lettuce a year, I think it is, but do not hold me to that—it might be eight. They send their lettuce to the big hotels, and they send a lot over east as well, mainly to hotels—they do not sell to IGA, Coles or Woolworths—and they have a full market with that. I think that that number of employees on 100 acres is fantastic.

I know that today is the last day, so I wanted to make sure that I remembered some of the members on the other side who will not be around as they are retiring. I want to mention Hon Jon Ford, member for the Mining and Pastoral Region. He has been a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration for the past four years, along with me, Hon Jim Chown and also Hon Ed Dermer. We had many inquiries and did lots of travelling together, apart from Hon Ed Dermer; he did not travel with us, unfortunately. Obviously, I ran into Hon Jon Ford in the Kimberley on many occasions. He had his electorate office in Newman. I must say that I have a lot of respect for Hon Jon Ford and his passion for the regional areas in the north, in the Pilbara and in the Kimberley. I enjoyed Hon Ed Dermer's time as the opposition Whip; that was for four years. Ed is such a pedantic person that when you had the minutes, you could rely on Ed to go through them and make sure that every dot and every comma was there.

Hon Jim Chown: I think we purposely left some out so he could find them.

Hon KEN BASTON: I think there were a couple of occasions when we thought we would test him, and he did find them. He was always very good at that.

The other member I want to mention is Hon Helen Bullock. I was privileged to have Hon Helen Bullock with me on a trip to China. I have the utmost respect for Hon Helen Bullock because she was able to be our interpreter.

[Leave granted for the member's speech to be continued at a later sitting.]

Debate interrupted, on motion by **Hon Peter Collier (Leader of the House)**.

[Continued on page 783.]