

DIRECT MARITIME FREIGHT SERVICE — PILBARA

**1024. Hon SIMON O'BRIEN to the Minister for Regional Development:**

I have a question without notice. I refer to the minister's media statement of 19 February this year, entitled "First steps towards direct maritime freight to the Pilbara", and her quote —

"These two studies show there could be significant regional economic savings and opportunities if a direct maritime freight service to the Pilbara was established.

"We know some attempts have been made in the past to establish a direct service, but the benefits are such that we need to look at having another go.

Can the minister clarify what benefits they might be and what progress has been made to implement this possible proposal?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

One of the benefits, if we are not taking freight via Sydney or Fremantle and then taking it up to the Pilbara, is that we can very clearly reduce costs, because at the moment much of the freight that we are talking about goes to Sydney and Perth and is then roaded up to the Pilbara. We see this as a real possibility of opening up the Pilbara, for example, and it fits in with the work that we are doing on the Karratha–Tom Price road—a road that was abandoned for eight and a half years but is now back on track. The ability to bring product and mining equipment et cetera directly into the Pilbara would mean that rather than maintaining those mines around Paraburdoo, Tom Price, Balla Balla and the new mining resources that are opening up, they could be maintained and serviced from the Pilbara. Very significant companies in the Pilbara are also working on this project, and they see the very great benefits of doing that so that we do have not a FIFO workforce coming in and maintaining the mines, but the potential for more locally based people to maintain the mines in that area. We also see that it has some potential—I do not want to exaggerate it—for various types of processing if materials can be brought in more cheaply and more directly. We are working with the private sector on this project. It is not something that will happen overnight but, certainly, some very significant companies are very committed to this idea.