

PLANNING REFORMS

321. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Premier:

I refer to the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on the WA economy. Can the Premier outline to the house how the McGowan government's proposed planning reforms will support the state's economic recovery from COVID-19, and can the Premier advise the house what these reforms will mean for major projects and how they will support local jobs and local businesses like those in my electorate of Kingsley?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Kingsley. Clearly, Western Australia and the world are in an extraordinary time. We have seen a shock to the economy like never before in any of our lifetimes. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost, businesses have closed, and it is the greatest economic crisis in about four generations. As we go through this, it is important that we put in place some bold and ambitious reforms that will provide business confidence and drive investment. That is what the planning reforms we are bringing forward are all about. They are to kickstart our economy and provide confidence, and, given the crisis that we face, these reforms are absolutely urgent. We cannot delay and prevent significant investment from occurring in Western Australia.

The burden of economic recovery cannot rest solely on government. Western Australian government spend is about seven per cent of the state economy and 93 per cent is from elsewhere; therefore, unleashing some of that other investment is very important, particularly in the area of building and construction. As I said earlier, about 80 per cent of investment in infrastructure comes from the private sector.

The reforms that the Minister for Planning and I have announced today will establish new investment application processes for significant job-creating projects, which would be in place for around 18 months. They will temporarily establish the independent Western Australian Planning Commission as a new decision-making authority for all development proposals of state significance. These reforms are not about automatic approvals, but making sure that decisions are made quickly based upon good decision-making practices and proper consultation, both environmentally and with local authorities.

Projects that will go before this process will be over \$30 million residential and non-residential commercial projects, and projects can be referred into this process by the Premier on the recommendation of the Minister for Planning, particularly for regional or tourism projects that might fall under the \$30 million threshold. We think that will be very important in the case of regions, where some projects do not meet that threshold.

As I said, there will still be public consultation and consultation of local government, and the Western Australian Planning Commission must engage with the Environmental Protection Authority on all significant development processes, as well as the Heritage Council of Western Australia for any that require heritage protection. It is not about encouraging speculative projects, but supporting projects that have a degree of investment certainty and that need to get through processes quickly.

If we are serious about getting our economy back to strength, serious reforms need to be put in place. As I said, these are the sorts of things that are discussed in the national cabinet: how do we get projects through the red tape as quickly as possible? This is an important one. The other one is a proposition I put to the Prime Minister about aligning the EPA and the environmental protection and biodiversity conservation processes so that they work well together. Obviously, the Prime Minister is keen on that. There has been some slowness at the commonwealth end, which I think is understandable in the context and the environment, about putting those processes in place, but certainly the Western Australian government is keen on both, not to reduce environmental protection, but to reduce duplication in environmental processes.

Today's reforms are once in a lifetime reform. They are bold and ambitious. They are about creating thousands of jobs at a time of great uncertainty.