

FREMANTLE PORT — UPGRADE

**419. Hon KEN BASTON to the Minister for Transport:**

Can the minister advise the house on any current upgrade works at Fremantle port?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:**

I thank the member for his question. I know he is very interested in these matters. I advise the house that reconstruction of berth 10 on North Quay has commenced. That is part of a multimillion-dollar infrastructure program that will see not only the reconstruction of berth 10 but also the reinforcement of all the other container berths—that is, berth 9 back down to berth 4—together with the deepening of the inner harbour to 14 metres. I announced details of this project during a recent visit to the port.

The reason for the deepening program in the inner harbour is to recognise that the average size of container vessels on the world's sea lanes is growing appreciably. Various statistics have been produced to justify the deepening program. As we sometimes see in transport journals, one statistic shows that the average container vessel today is three times the size of a container vessel of the late 1960s, or, to bring it to more up-to-date terms, over the past 15 years the average size of container vessels has increased by a whopping 85 per cent. Although Fremantle was a major port of origin or destination in previous eras of maritime trade, it now no longer is because of the size of vessels that ply the ocean sea lanes. Fremantle port is no longer a major port of destination or even of transit, as are Hong Kong, Singapore or other major ports. We have to make sure that vessels on their way to larger ports, such as Melbourne and Sydney, do call in to Fremantle to make sure that our trade requirements are met because we are a major exporting state. They will do that and they are doing that, but we need to make sure that we make it worth their while to guarantee they continue to do that.

Already we are seeing some post-Panamax-size container vessels on the Australian run. Frankly, at the moment they cannot enter Fremantle harbour to full capacity because, if they did, they would be bumping along the bottom of the harbour and that would not give us any confidence at all. Hopefully the maximum drafts that we will be able to entertain will grow from about 12.8 metres to 13.5 metres when this work is done. That is with a total deepening program of about 14 metres, because, obviously, we have got to leave some space below these massive vessels. This is an important project. It will cost in excess of \$98 million. It will be good for Western Australia. I thank the member for his interest.