

*Browse Basin Project, Broome — Adjournment Debate*

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.58 pm]: I was fortunate enough to attend two functions in Broome on the Anzac Day holiday on Monday, 27 April at which Premier Barnett, the federal Minister for Resources and Energy, Martin Ferguson, and Mr Don Voelte were in attendance. These gentlemen were there for two significant reasons. The first one was the opening of the heliport at the Broome airport. The second one was the signing of the agreement with the Indigenous owners of James Price Point, the site chosen for the gas precinct. It was a very historic occasion as the signing took place at James Price Point. It has had heaps of press, and rightly so; however, the heliport has not attracted press attention. Both of those issues are very much linked to the Browse Basin. The heliport offers immediate benefits to the town of Broome, to the region and to Western Australia. I congratulate the airport owners on their foresight, planning and ability to make these things happen. The Broome airport is one of the largest regional airports in Western Australia, and the hangars that have been built to house the helicopters that operate out of the airport at a cost of some \$6 million further cements Broome's position as an aviation hub for tourism and offshore facilities.

The Browse Basin project will provide diversification of job opportunities in Broome outside the tourism and pearling industries for which the town is so well known. The heliport employs some 50 staff at the base, including pilots, engineers and maintenance staff. When these helicopters return to the heliport, they have to be opened up, cooled down and sprayed down because of the sea air that they suck in. They have alloy heads, so every time one of the choppers is used over the ocean, it has to be sprayed down afterwards by engineers. People employed to service the helicopters.

Most of the rig workers are fly in, fly out. The benefit for the tourism industry is that these people fill the planes and allow tourist seats to be sold at a reasonable price. The interesting thing is that air traffic at Broome airport is going against the national trend. There was a nine per cent increase in air traffic over the first four months of the year. I know that air traffic numbers for other airlines that run services to other destinations in the state have actually dropped; I know that last year, air traffic numbers for one particular airline dropped by some 23 per cent. The multiplier effect of having these jobs in Broome is an extra 150 jobs. There are baggage handlers, cleaners, refuellers, catering staff, accommodation staff and taxi drivers whose jobs all hinge on this hub.

The helicopters used are some of the largest operating in Australia. At present there are Bristow Eurocopters, which is the type that most rigs use. An interesting one is a larger helicopter called the Sikorsky S92. I have a bit of a mechanical interest, and this helicopter is the only one used in Australia by the offshore oil industry. This particular chopper can carry 19 people and is large enough to walk around in; it is two metres wide and nearly two metres high, so it is a luxurious helicopter. I have to tell members that its price tag is \$40 million, and another one has been ordered. That gives members some indication of what the Browse Basin means to Western Australia. All the servicing of the helicopters takes place at the hangars in Broome, except for major airframe testing, which is done in South Australia. During the recent fire disaster on the refugee boat, this helicopter set off with medical staff on board, only to find that it could not land on the deck of either the HMAS *Albany* or the HMAS *Childers*, because it weighs 12 tonnes. In fact, there are very few rigs it can actually land on. There will be an upgrade of rigs so that these choppers can land on them, and safety precautions will need to be revised because of these larger choppers. The helicopter services three rigs operated by ConocoPhillips, Shell Development and Woodside. Flight times to the rigs and back are approximately 2.5 hours. Of course, growth will increase when Santos starts its operations there.

It is good to see the confidence that the industry has in the future of Broome in that it is investing in these hangars, and it is good to see that the Indigenous people recognise the benefits of the gas industry. I believe that the flow-on effects for them in education, health et cetera that will come from the agreement that they have signed will be of great benefit. It is also good to see the business opportunities for growth and development that will occur in that area. I believe that we will get a critical mass from people being employed for 12 months of the year, rather than the town of Broome having seasonal tourism. The press has not picked up on the value that is already being created by the offshore operations of the Browse Basin project.