

KALGOORLIE NICKEL SMELTER — FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Statement by Minister for Mines and Petroleum

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [9.17 am]: I would like to inform the house of a major milestone for the state's nickel industry and congratulate BHP Nickel West on its 50-year anniversary of operations at the Kalgoorlie nickel smelter. The Kalgoorlie nickel smelter was opened on 7 April 1973 by then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and has been running ever since. The Kalgoorlie nickel smelter was the first nickel smelter in Australia and is still the largest integrated flash furnace in the world to process nickel.

Over its five decades of operations, it is estimated to have produced around 3.5 million tonnes of nickel matte. The smelter was originally built by Western Mining Corporation, before BHP acquired the company in 2005 and rebranded its nickel operations as Nickel West. The smelter has been an integral part of the state's world-class nickel industry since its opening, processing nickel concentrate from Nickel West's operations, as well as third-party operations in the Kalgoorlie–Boulder region. The smelter currently processes nickel concentrate from Nickel West's Mt Keith and Leinster operations, as well as third-party nickel that is initially processed at its Kambalda concentrator plant. The smelter produces between 80 000 and 105 000 tonnes of nickel matte per annum, with the majority sent on to Nickel West's Kwinana refinery and converted into high-quality refined nickel.

The Kalgoorlie nickel smelter has been a large employer in the Kalgoorlie–Boulder region for five decades. In 2021–22, BHP Nickel West's Kalgoorlie operations employed an average of 486 full-time equivalent employees, with a majority of workers coming from the region. Refined nickel powder from the smelter has also recently started to be further processed into nickel sulphate at Australia's first nickel sulphate plant, co-located at the Kwinana nickel refinery. Nickel sulphate is an essential ingredient in the lithium-ion batteries that drive electric cars and is essential to the global transition to net zero emissions. With more than 85 per cent of BHP Nickel West's products sold to global battery material suppliers, the Kalgoorlie nickel smelter is a significant piece of Western Australia's world-leading future battery industry and the transition to net zero emissions.