

**ESPERANCE PORT — INFRASTRUCTURE**

*Statement by Minister for Ports*

**MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta — Minister for Ports)** [9.25 am]: I am pleased to provide an update to the house on recent investments by the Cook government in our ports. There was a recent \$12.2 million commitment by the Cook government to a suite of road access improvements at the port of Esperance. Stage 1 of the works are already underway with a \$7.4 million upgrade to the sole heavy vehicle access road into the port. This work is vital to the safe and efficient operation of road transport, which has been growing in recent years. There are more than 300 000 truck movements per year, in and out of the port, carrying about 44 per cent of total trade, with the remainder being handled by rail. In all, about six million tonnes is delivered to the port by road each year, highlighting the importance of investment in roads within and around the port. The port of Esperance is a crucial port for the region's iron ore, minerals and grain export trades, as well as the emerging spodumene trade. Western Australia's lithium trade will expand rapidly in coming years, and Esperance is already likely to be the third-largest spodumene export port in the world.

Esperance is the only deepwater port in the southern region and one of only two ports equipped with container cranes in the state, the other being Fremantle. Stages 2 and 3 of the port roads improvement program will deliver further improvements to roads within the port, worth an additional \$12.2 million, staged over three years. These works will include the reconstruction of degraded areas of road pavement on existing heavy vehicle roads within the port, as well as changes to the existing port access intersection layout to accommodate the significant growth in triple road trains accessing it. When the work is complete, heavy vehicles will have easier port access with a more streamlined route that avoids unsafe interactions and challenging turning circles.

As the port continues to diversify beyond its traditional iron ore base, the delivery of quality road infrastructure is essential. So too is the prioritisation of the safety of our road users and port workers, while also positioning the port of Esperance to accommodate trade growth. As the region's second largest employer with almost 300 people across the south west, the Southern Ports Authority continues to be a crucial economic driver, providing jobs, security and stability for families throughout the region. Ongoing investment in all our regional ports is vital to the state's economy and consolidates the Cook government's standing as a model for economic management across the country.