

EAST–WEST FREIGHT DISRUPTIONS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

9. Ms R.S. STEPHENS to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the recent flooding of the east–west freight line that caused disruption to our supply chains.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the efforts undertaken by the McGowan Labor government to work with industry and the federal government to ensure the supply of goods into Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether any members of the opposition oppose the government's efforts to get essential supplies on our supermarket shelves?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. Yes, I have some very good news today: the east–west rail link is now open. It was out of action for 24 days when a one-in-200-year flood impacted the rail line. Over 300 kilometres of that rail line was damaged along 18 different work fronts. It was an incredible challenge to fix. I congratulate the industry and the 100 workers, who have been working 24/7 to make sure they fix the rail line. The workers came from Western Australia, South Australia and across the nation. I also thank the federal government for being very proactive and working with our government on this. That included coordinating very, very important meetings between industry, the retail sector and state governments to make sure that we all worked together to help, over the 24 days, to provide interim solutions and on how we could provide other ways to improve the resilience of that freight link.

A number of measures were put into place. A land bridge concept was put into place within a couple of weeks of the rail line being out, and that included a combination of rail, and truck and rail, coming into Western Australia. We worked to facilitate exemptions to allow bigger trucks into WA, such as B-triples into Kalgoorlie and B-doubles all the way into Perth under escort to make sure that we could get more trucks here quickly to allow more deliveries into Western Australia. We also worked with the ports, again through the federal authorities, to facilitate exemptions for shipping lines. We have seen ships with containers come from the eastern states. They were all interim measures. Today, nine trains are moving across the nation and bringing essential goods. These types of events do not happen very often. As I said, we did not expect the east–west rail link to be out for 24 days, but, importantly, we are all working together. This will take a number of weeks to, in a sense, make sure that we remove the backlog from over east and make sure that the shelves are filled. I am confident that with everyone working together we will make sure those shelves are filled as soon as possible.

The commonwealth government is working with the state, the retailers are working with us, and we are working with the trucking companies, but who is against our joint effort to address one of the biggest challenges we have faced in the transport and logistics field? It is, of course, the Leader of the Liberal Party, once again. He and his social media team, which has made some serious errors of judgement in what it puts out on social media, are again attacking this state government, which is working with the federal government. The Deputy Prime Minister stood up and congratulated the Western Australian government. Everyone who knows Barnaby Joyce knows that it is hard for him to congratulate a Labor government, but he congratulated everyone for working together to do what they could to make sure that we have products moving from east to west. I am very proud of everyone and of the truck drivers who, at very short notice, have made some huge contributions. They made sure that they prioritised the products coming into WA. Another prioritisation process is happening now that includes the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, because there were some issues about preferencing some goods over others.

We are all working together to prioritise getting into WA essential food, stock, medical supplies and water treatments. This has been a very hard challenge, given some of the labour shortages across the nation, but we have met that challenge and we will continue to work with industry, the federal government and other state governments to ensure that the supply chain across the nation continues.