

FITZROY RIVER BRIDGE — RECONSTRUCTION

730. Ms L. DALTON to the Premier:

I refer to the flooding emergency experienced in the Kimberley earlier this year and the Cook Labor government's subsequent response.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on the progress to build a new bridge at Fitzroy Crossing to reconnect the East and West Kimberley?
- (2) Can the Premier outline what economic and social benefits the project has had for the local community?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. It is a very important one. This is an opportunity for everyone in the Parliament to acknowledge some great work that has been undertaken in the Kimberley this year. We know that it has been challenging to build any infrastructure for the last several years. Workforce constraints, rising material costs and supply chain disruptions have impacted projects around the world, and we are not immune to that. In regional areas, it is even harder, but in the Kimberley we have had the extra element of the impact of not only the harsh terrain, but also the wet season and the challenges that come from that.

Developing successful infrastructure projects in remote areas needs careful planning, innovative engineering solutions and collaboration with local communities, not to mention an incredibly determined Minister for Transport. We saw the once-in-100-year floods in the Kimberley wreak havoc across that region, and that was felt most acutely in Fitzroy Crossing. The way that those floods tore through that community was shocking. Anyone who has been up there to see the devastation of that flood will really appreciate the impact that that has had on communities.

When the old bridge went down, it cut off the only route across the region and caused major disruption. The government acted immediately—firstly, to create a temporary low-level crossing; and, secondly, to embark on an expedited tender process to build a bigger and stronger new bridge to reconnect those communities. We all saw the impact of the roads being flooded or washed away, with whole supply chains completely disrupted and trucks having to travel via Alice Springs to get materials up there. It was a significant challenge for the community. Remember that this happened in January. By the end of March, an alliance contract was awarded to three local companies and Main Roads Western Australia. Then, just five months ago in May—just a short time ago—with the wet season over, groundworks and demolition began. This week, Main Roads confirmed that the bridge will be open to all traffic by the end of the year. This is an extraordinary outcome.

Dr D.J. Honey: You should get them onto Metronet. It would speed that up!

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: Clearly, the member for Cottesloe does not appreciate just how challenging this particular project was, and it has now been delivered six months ahead of time. The new bridge will be six times stronger than the original bridge. The piles were driven around 40 metres into the riverbed compared with around 15 metres for the old bridge. That gives people an idea of the scale of this flood. Pillars that went 15 metres into the riverbank were washed away like toothpicks. This was an extraordinary event. We now have a new bridge, which, at 270 metres long, is about 100 metres longer than the old bridge, and will also be wider so that traffic can pass. There will also be a pedestrian pathway.

Perhaps one of the more remarkable aspects of this project is the jobs that have been created for local people. The bridge project created a sharp spike in Aboriginal employment. Those of us who have had the privilege of seeing this project in place will have seen how nearly the whole community has been engaged, if not on the bridgeworks, then in other activities around the town site to continue to rebuild the houses in that area. Along with this, many Fitzroy Crossing locals have reported a noticeable decrease in crime and dysfunction. I am not surprised; they are so tired and busy from working! I spoke to one local businessman; this chap is the head of a plumbing business. I asked him how many people he was employing and he said that he had about 12 people working with him at the moment. I asked him how many people he would normally have, and he said, "Just me and my wife." This is a real indication of the huge lift in economic activity. The challenge will now be to make sure that we keep these people in an employment cycle by making sure there are other projects they can move on to, to really leverage from that tragic set of circumstances and produce some great economic and social outcomes for that community.

I congratulate all who were involved in this project, particularly the Minister for Transport for her great work in guiding the departments on this. I commend Main Roads, which has done a great job in working with the alliance contract partners to bring about this incredible project in such an extraordinarily short time. To all the workers involved: thank you for the incredible work you have done so far. Everyone should be incredibly proud of the progress. It is truly an extraordinary result to reconnect this important route in such a short time after an emergency,

and that is to the great credit of everyone involved. I look forward to seeing the new bridge open in the very near future.