

HANSARD

17 MARCH 2010

ORD – EAST KIMBERLEY EXPANSION PROJECT

Dr M.D. NAHAN to the Minister for Regional Development:

Following the Premier's announcement of the preferred proponent for stage 1 of the Ord – East Kimberley expansion project yesterday, will the minister outline to the house the social and economic benefits that will flow to the traditional owners of the land, the Miriuwung–Gajerrong people?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS replied:

I thank the member for Riverton for the question and his interest in this project. I think that all Western Australians are very interested to see how we can progress this project and how we can deliver on the outcomes that we have set ourselves in the East Kimberley. The Liberal–National government's \$220 million Ord – East Kimberley expansion project reached its biggest milestone yesterday when the Premier announced the awarding of the first major construction contract.

The project is funded under the royalties for regions program and aims to deliver significant agricultural expansion, but probably more importantly, significant engagement with the local Indigenous community. The successful proponent is a joint venture between Leighton and Indigenous Business Australia, and I congratulate Leighton and IBA, which put an enormous amount of effort into not only understanding the needs of the construction contract, but also engaging with the Miriuwung–Gajerrong people and making sure that they could deliver a project that met the requirements of delivering advantage and economic opportunity to the Miriuwung–Gajerrong people.

May I also acknowledge the three other proponents, which were not successful, for the work that they did also in engaging with the local community. It was disappointing that someone had to miss out, but there can be only one successful proponent. For members' information, phase 1 of the project includes construction of 19 kilometres of irrigation channel, a 13-kilometre road extension and irrigation control structures, as well as the implementation of Indigenous and local employment, and business programs. On completion, the project will increase the Ord irrigation area to 22 000 hectares, with the first release of the new agricultural blocks expected by 2011.

The criterion of the contract was a very important part of this project. For the first time I think anywhere in Australia, 40 per cent of the contract was based on engagement with the local Miriuwung–Gajerrong people and local traditional owners. I do not think there has ever been a project like this before which has placed such focus on the engagement of the contract with the local Indigenous community, aimed at delivering economic benefit to them, engaging them in the job opportunities in and around the project and ensuring that there is an outcome for them, because, at the end of the day, this project is based around the Ord final agreement negotiated by the previous government, which laid a framework for native title to be settled and for this project to be possible.

The state will now enter into negotiations with the Leighton–IBA joint venture, with a contract expected to be finalised in the next month and major construction underway in the next couple of months. Currently, on the ground in the East Kimberley, Ertech is providing site work and service infrastructure for all workers village in Kununurra.

Indigenous-based group Wanna Work Company has been subcontracted to provide Indigenous labour for this project. It is the first, real, on-ground activity in this project, and I am happy to announce that up to 15 Indigenous workers are actually working on this project. They have been through the training that is required to drive the excavators to work in contract and they are on site. I met with them over the weekend to see the excellent work that they are doing.

May I also report to the house something that I think has been a remarkable transformation in the East Kimberley, and that is the willingness of the private sector, the small business sector in the East Kimberley, to engage with the Miriuwung–Gajerrong people and create other Indigenous employment opportunities.

Mr E.S. Ripper: What role did Peter Stubbs have in all this?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Peter Stubbs played a very important role. He has delivered the project and delivered the workers at the Wanna Works Company and their moving from welfare into the workforce. That is an absolutely outstanding opportunity. Kimberley Group Training, a group training organisation in Kununurra, presently employs 250 people, 80 per cent of whom are Indigenous. It currently has positions for 175 Newstart program apprentices.

Over the past three months Kimberley Group Training has run three free employment programs in building, construction and hospitality, and 36 Indigenous people have been through that program and are ready for placement into the business sector. The Miriuwung–Gajerrong people signed that Ord final agreement with the former Treasurer aimed at delivering a substantial outcome for their people and their children and their community generally.

The Liberal–National government has taken that challenge; it has taken an agreement, a piece of paper that was put into the filing cabinet, and turned it into a project that is delivering jobs on the ground in the East Kimberley. The Liberal–National Government will continue to look at projects such as those in the Ord and at James Price Point and at the Pilbara Cities program to deliver an unbelievable economic advantage for the local Indigenous community. It has never been pushed this hard before. We are proud as a Liberal–National government to drive that for the maximum opportunity.