

KIMBERLEY — YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW

On 6 March 2013, **the Hon. Barry Haase MP** (Federal Member for Durack, WA) treated the Kimberley Society to his view of the Kimberley. The electorate of Durack extends from Kalumburu to Kellerberrin, embracing Broome, Derby, Wyndham, Kununurra, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Port Hedland, Carnarvon, Geraldton, Wiluna, Newman, and other towns, and taking in a vast amount of country beyond those towns. With an area of approximately 1,587,758 sq km, Durack is the largest electorate in Australia. Mr Haase has represented it since 2010, having been re-elected following the 2008 electoral redistribution in which the electoral division of Durack was proclaimed. Before that, in 1998, 2001, 2004 and 2007, he was elected to the House of Representatives for Kalgoorlie.

Discussing **yesterday**, Mr Haase touched on the formation of the Kimberley's spectacular landscape millions of years ago, the arrival of Aboriginal people tens of thousands of years ago, the arrival of Macassan trepanners in the late 17th century, and the arrival of Europeans, at intervals, in and after 1688. An outline of exploration, grazing, mining, pearling, and other pursuits followed, showing how the region came to be as it is today. Viewed from this perspective, the events of the past 100 years or so were seen to constitute only a very small component of the region's history.

Covering **today**, Mr Haase spoke of various industries supported by land, water and resources. He mentioned the towns and National Parks, the Commonwealth Marine Reserve (74,469 sq km), and the major conservation values. After drawing attention to the size of the Kimberley (over 420,000 sq km), he noted that the proposed LNG Precinct at James Price Point would require only 25 sq km (0.006% of the Kimberley) and, consequently, would not result in the industrialisation of the region. Nor, he said, would the precinct have an adverse effect on the Dampier Peninsula. It would occupy only 0.25% of the Peninsula, which, excluding islands, contains 9,890 sq km of land and 1,015 km of coastline.

Summing up his view of **today**, Mr Haase said:

The Kimberley is not as it was thousands of years ago. Everyone has left a footprint of some sort or the other, and some more visible than another.

Entrepreneurs have entwined natural beauty, tourism and industry. Should this stop now, I don't think so.

That led to **tomorrow**, with discussion of coal and live cattle exports, a deep water port at Point Torment (out of Derby), and strategically placed dams that would see many thousands of hectares of black soil plains in the Fitzroy River Valley provide food for a global market. A bright future was also envisaged for the Ord irrigation area – as a food bowl for both Australia and Asia. New infrastructure and a well managed workforce would be the key to much of this prosperity, with residence in the Kimberley made more attractive than fly in fly out options. There would also be enhanced scope for tertiary education, less reliance on welfare, and better handling of the problems arising from alcohol abuse.

While acknowledging that dichotomies exist when development or radical change is advocated, Mr Haase argued that the Kimberley needs both development and change. He anticipated a strong reaction to some of the points he made, and he was not disappointed. The question time following his talk was lively, with no shortage of topics raised for discussion. Foremost among those topics was whether Aboriginal ownership of cattle stations has meant advancement for communities, and whether, as Mr Haase believes, greater integration of Aboriginal people into the workforce will resolve many of the problems they currently face.

Cathie Clement