



Port is open for business



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ESPERANCE is open for business and the future looks exciting for the region, according to the Esperance Chamber of Commerce and Industry following Wednesday's Over the Horizon forum.

Mining companies and infrastructure providers gave brief snapshots of future activities planned for the region, prompting an optimistic response from forum attendees.

There were also presentations about the planned eco-resort development in the Cape le Grand National Park and a proposal to export containerised grain from the Esperance port.

One of the major projects about to benefit the region is First Quantum's Ravensthorpe Nickel Operation.

First Quantum government and community relations manager Dave Coggin said the company was aiming to start commercial production by the end of the year. He said workers had gone through the plant from top to bottom to overhaul and modify its operations.

Mr Coggin said about 300 construction workers were on the site, with that number set to decrease as start-up approached.

He said the mine would have a workforce of 500 people, with 150 living locally in Hopetoun and Ravensthorpe.

"So far we've got about 50 of them in place and we are on target to meet the 150," he said.

Mr Coggin said First Quantum would be transporting about 170,000t of product to the Esperance port by road annually once commercial production gets under way.

Details of the port access corridor project were also provided by Main Roads WA project director Arthur Phillips. Mr Phillips said the project would realign the road and rail links into the port to avoid ongoing traffic conflicts.

He said the project would help increase the iron ore export capacity to 30 million tonnes per annum. "The main inefficiencies in the corridor is movement for road trains coming into the port and the delay caused by trains as they come into the port across that level crossing at Smith Street," he said.

Mr Phillips said Main Roads was waiting for approval from the Environmental Protection Authority to proceed with the project and was in the process of acquiring properties that would be affected by it.

A contract for the works was expected to be awarded in October, with construction due to start in January or February next year and be completed by December 2013.

He said the project was expected to be fully completed, including landscaping by the winter of 2014.

Esperance Ports Sea and Land chief executive Mikal Frydrych outlined plans for the expansion of the port and said final approval to proceed was still being sought from Transport Minister Troy Buswell.

He said the second stage would have minimal impact on the town and would mainly focus on extending the existing iron ore berth to accommodate two ships.

Yilgarn Iron Producers Association chairman Greg Bromley said the forum had generated much innovative thinking and positive ideas for the future of the region.

He said the YIPA's 13 members were working together on areas of common interest, particularly access to infrastructure services.

ECCI chief executive Grant Shipp said the region had a very positive future. "It is fantastic to be a part of this region's economy at this point in time," he said.

Forum master of ceremonies and ECCI member Brett Thorp encouraged the local community to get behind all the projects planned for the region.

"We encourage everyone to act in a positive manner and get behind driving Esperance's future in the next 20 years," Mr Thorp said.

"Esperance is open for business."



Positive: Graham Harvey, Hugh Gallagher and Shane Adams are enthusiastic about the region. Photo: TIM SLATER