

Saleyards a winner

■ Kendall O'Connor

WA Agriculture Minister Ken Baston has heaped praise on Katanning's new multi-million dollar saleyards ahead of their official opening next month.

Mr Baston visited the state-of-the-art facility for the first time on Tuesday last week as part of a tour of Department of Agriculture and Food offices across the State.

He said the innovative facility, which includes 1270 pens and is licensed to hold 45,000 sheep, was "fantastic".

"I think it's a credit to all that have been involved and it's just a really good news story," he said.

"I cannot praise it high enough and I'm looking forward to the opening day."

Premier Colin Barnett will be in Katanning on May 28 to open the saleyards officially, with the first sheep to be sold at the facility that day.

Katanning Shire president Alan McFarland said just under \$44 million had been budgeted for the saleyards project, but by sourcing its workforce from within the shire, only around \$25 million had been spent.

He said one of the major benefits of hiring a local workforce was the project had been a skills incubator for the town.

"We trained so many people and they were poached off us," Cr McFarland said.

"They learned to weld, (then) they became FIFO workers or they got a job with a local engineering place in town, so we had to employ someone else and teach them how to weld," he said.

Cr McFarland said the saleyards could encourage other agricultural businesses to move inland. "We have got the abattoir, we have got the saleyards, we have got the land, and we have got the workforce," he said.

"We need to shift industry inland and that's where Katanning is going to come to the fore."



Minister for Agriculture Ken Baston, Shire of Katanning chief executive Dean Taylor and president Alan McFarland tour the new Katanning saleyards. Picture: Kendall O'Connor