

TOURISM — INVESTMENT

584. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Tourism:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's record investment in growing tourism and creating jobs, including its unprecedented efforts to attract more visitors to regional Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what has been the impact of this government's work in making airfares to regional WA more affordable?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how regional tourism businesses are benefiting from this government's record investment?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I thank the member for his question and his robust support of the tourism sector of Western Australia.

- (1)–(2) The McGowan government's efforts to make regional airfares more affordable are probably best recognised through the emblematic affordable flights to Broome, which have been successful and encouraged Qantas to also recently announce and offer affordable flights to Exmouth. The government has also made a lot of effort, particularly the Minister for Transport in conjunction with her agencies and Tourism WA, to focus on how we might help in the regulated air routes space. Since the McGowan government and Rex airlines introduced regulated airfares in July 2018 to Monkey Mia and Carnarvon, passenger numbers have significantly increased. The number of visitors to Monkey Mia have increased by 55 per cent over 12 months, while Carnarvon has had a 20 per cent boost in passengers compared with the previous year. That is extraordinary and all down to the efforts of the Minister for Transport and her agencies doing some work and getting Rex, a great airline, to help regional Western Australia by making it more affordable for people to fly.

We inherited the Albany and Esperance routes. Rex was already offering community airfares to those towns. Through Tourism WA and our two-year action plan, we have pushed the community's awareness of those routes and, as a consequence, the number of passengers travelling on those routes has increased significantly. Mr Speaker, you would be happy to know that nearly 61 500 passengers travelled to Albany over the last 12 months and 51 000 passengers travelled to Esperance. Member for Kalgoorlie, Esperance is part of the golden outback tourism region —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: He is the member for Roe.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know that, but Esperance is part of the golden outback tourism region. I was just drawing that to the attention of the member for Kalgoorlie. I know that the member for Roe knows that. He is very excited about it and he tells me all the time. Skippers Aviation has also offered a community fare on the northern goldfields routes that has been taken up by 1 500 people across all five towns since September last year—not July. I would like to say to the members for Kalgoorlie and Roe that between March 2018 and March 2019, a record number of visitors came into Western Australia from outside the state, as they already know. However, in their particular regional tourism area, which includes Kalgoorlie and Esperance, visitors increased by 3.9 per cent. In the south west, which interestingly includes Albany as far as tourism regions go —

The SPEAKER: I have a point of order. Albany is not in the south west. We are in the great southern, thank you.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Far be it for me to ever question the Chair. However, there is a regional tourism organisation called the south west, which incorporates Albany and the great southern. I am sorry. That is a fact.

The SPEAKER: That is where all the money goes—to the south west.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Mr Speaker would be more interested to know that visitors to that particular region have designated it Lonely Planet's number 1 place to visit in all of Asia-Pacific this year. That area has seen a 14 per cent increase in visitors over the past 12 months to March this year. Visitors to the coral coast, including Carnarvon and Monkey Mia, have increased by 5.7 per cent, probably on the back of Chris Hemsworth going there. Although, it might have happened as a result of me going there in advance of Chris Hemsworth, because I do not think that happened until after March. Nevertheless, things are working up there. We acknowledge that before the McGowan government took office, there was a tremendous problem in the regions. They had been neglected, particularly by the National Party. There was no effort at all to reduce regional airfares. They soared throughout the eight and a half years of the Barnett government.

We said that we would hold an inquiry immediately upon taking office. We did that and now the Minister for Transport and her agencies have been working with Tourism WA ever since to establish more affordable flights in the regions as part of the two-year action plan. There is more to be done. John Bowler in Kalgoorlie said nothing throughout the Barnett government years, but I hear that he has just noticed that airfares are expensive.

I hear him and we are working on something. We want to do more for the regions, as we always do, than any other government in history. I am glad that the transport minister is on the job, and I thank her and her agencies for their efforts.