

DIRECT FLIGHTS — PERTH–JAPAN

**186. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Tourism:**

I refer to the Queensland state government securing Qantas daily flights between Japan and Brisbane from August, which is projected to add 61 000 extra visitors to Queensland each year and generate a significant number of tourism jobs.

- (1) Did the minister do anything to get a similar deal for Western Australia?
- (2) Is it not true that originally there was an option of four flights a week to Brisbane, with three other flights to Perth, but the minister missed out on that?
- (3) Considering the government lost direct flights to Japan four years ago, why did the minister not jump at this opportunity to resecure them?

**Dr K.D. HAMES replied:**

(1)–(3) The answer to the first question is yes—not no, as some smart person on the other side said. What happened was that very soon after I became minister three or four years ago, we looked at increasing our flights coming to Western Australia both from China and Japan, and at that time Qantas had just cancelled its direct flights to Perth because of very high costs in the structure of the airline, and a lack of passengers. Remember, at that time Japan went through a significant downturn and the number of tourists coming out of Japan had significantly reduced so we went to China. The Leader of the Opposition, who was a Minister for Tourism in the former Labor government, reckoned he had some hand in this, but it went absolutely nowhere; the Labor government was a dismal failure. We went over there, negotiated directly with China Southern Airlines and signed a deal for those direct flights. On that same trip, I went to Japan. I met with Japan Airlines, Qantas and, I think, Cathay Pacific, to talk about the prospect of providing direct flights to Perth. Qantas said it was not interested in doing that as it was not part of its new profile—that was three years ago.

**Mr P. Papalia** This decision was in December.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I was not the minister last year.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, you have asked a question. Let the minister answer the question and you can have a supplementary question.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** I went to Japan Airlines and it said it had just been through enormous financial difficulties—it had the same cost profile as Qantas in running the airline—and it did not see any chance of making it economically viable in the near future. But it said it would keep that space —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** It said it would keep that space —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I call you to order for the second time, member for Warnbro. Member for Albany, I do not want to hear from you.

**Dr K.D. HAMES:** Those negotiations were undertaken three years ago. Since that time there has been a great strengthening of the market in Japan and a lot more interest in tourism. I have not asked the former tourism minister, the member for Scarborough, exactly what was done in this space when she was minister, but I have had feedback from the department that there was considerable involvement under her watch in negotiations with Japan to try to get it to come back to Western Australia. We will continue to do that. The flight from Japan to Queensland is much shorter and there is a much bigger population base, so the chance of Queensland being successful in getting the flights needed is greater. It is understandable that that would be Japan's first choice in dipping its toe in the water to see if it can make it economically viable again. However, we will continue to work through that. We work through other airlines such as China Southern Airlines in particular, which also has flights through Guangzhou to Japan. Cathay Pacific is a very strong performer in that space and, of course, Singapore Airlines goes from Perth to Singapore and on to Japan. It is not as though there is no other option for people to catch those flights. Even with the very strong success rate we have had with China Southern going through Guangzhou, a lot of people, including Chinese, still choose to fly Cathay Pacific as their preferred option to get into Japan. People choose the airline they want. All we can do as a state government is work with airlines and with promoters to promote ourselves to ensure that we bring as many people here as possible. My understanding is that the tourist numbers from Japan have been increasing.

