

REGIONAL SPONSORED MIGRATION SCHEME — INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

283. Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE to the Minister for Tourism:

I draw the minister's attention to an article by Steven O'Neil, headed "McGowan 'putting a wrecking ball' through WA's international student market", which states that the Premier is —

... making it very clear that international students are not welcome in the state.

How does the minister justify his government's changes to the regional sponsored migration scheme that have removed incentives for international students to study in Perth?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I have no idea who the individual being quoted is. However, it is an interesting observation that suggests that somehow the current government and the Premier are putting a wrecking ball through international education. I note, of course, that anyone who is familiar with international education outcomes in Western Australia understands that this state for a very long time under the previous government has been massively underperforming. In fact, under the previous government —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, I do not know what you got up to in your holidays, but since you have come back you just have not stopped talking. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is very unkind; I did invite the member for Vasse to be in photos with me at the Margaret River Pro announcement.

Under the previous government our proportion of the overall number of international students who visit Australia fell from in excess of 12 per cent to about 7.9 per cent currently. That is the consequence of the previous government's inadequacy and incapacity to focus on anything other than sitting back and letting the dollars roll in during the boom and its lack of attention to trying to diversify the economy.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr P. PAPALIA: The current government identified that flaw and failure almost a year before the election when we released "WA Labor Plan for Jobs", a key element of which was pursuing a greater share of international students. We expect that at the very least we should get the same proportion as the per capita rate of population of Australia.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr P. PAPALIA: We should get 12 per cent; that is what our aim should be. It is currently 7.9 per cent or thereabouts.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members on my left, this is not a debate. You have asked the question. Just let him give the answer. You might not like the answer but just listen to it. If you keep interjecting, I will call you to order.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The first trade delegation that the Premier will lead will be to China, with a focus on tourism and, as announced six months before the election, we will have a focus on international students with a view to growing our share, particularly of the Chinese market. That is where you should have been years ago, member for Cottesloe, instead of sitting on your backside benefiting from the revenue streams during the mining boom.

The SPEAKER: Minister, through the Chair.

Mr P. PAPALIA: There should have been some effort to grow our share of international students at that time. There will be a delegation going to China of all the universities collaboratively working with the StudyPerth organisation, which we have increased the funding to.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Dawesville to order for the first time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: StudyPerth, which is the organisation responsible for drawing international students to Western Australia, has benefited from a 25 per cent increase to its budget annually under us. The opposition did not even respond; it did not even speak about international education during the last election. It is something it ignored.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the first time. Can you wrap it up, minister?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I welcome the discussion about international education because it is one of our objectives to clean up the mess that the Liberal Party left us and to grow the share to at least achieve the proportion of international students that we should have.