

TOURISM INDUSTRY — STRATEGIC PLAN

383. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Tourism:

I am very pleased to be part of a government that, in spite of economic uncertainty —

Several members interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The previous government did not care less about tourism. During the boom of the previous government, tourism flatlined. It is too late for members opposite to show whether they give a damn!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: After yesterday's question time, I was asked by some members why more questions were not asked. I think the answer to that is fairly evident. I want to hear the member for Scarborough's question. I do not want to hear anybody else trying to ask a question.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: In light of the government's decision not to throw away profit-making events like Rally Australia on a whim, will the minister please inform the house of the strategic plan for tourism in this state?

Dr E. CONSTABLE replied:

Before I address the member for Scarborough's question, I acknowledge in the public gallery some year 7 students from South Halls Head Primary School, which is in the Deputy Premier's electorate.

Tourism is a major industry in this state and one that was left to flounder during the seven and a half years of the previous Labor government. It is an industry with many large and small businesses. It is the small businesses that we have to keep an eye on. When we came to government, those small businesses were threatened by the global financial crisis and, more recently, by the high Australian dollar and cheap airfares.

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Victoria Park, if someone asked you a question, I would expect to hear your answer without interruption. I expect to hear this answer without you continually interjecting. I formally call you to order for the first time.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Recognising that the industry has been faced with the global financial crisis, a high Australian dollar and cheap airfares, which are luring Australians overseas in their tens of thousands, we are conscious that we must support the industry in the way we have been doing.

The first part of our initiative to support the industry has been to increase our marketing activity. Given the boom times of the last government —

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

The SPEAKER: I do not know whether the member for Victoria Park is trying to set a personal record; I hope not. I formally call you for the second time.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: The time has come for members of the opposition to stop running down Western Australian tourism and to start supporting it.

The first part of our initiative was to increase the allocation of marketing funds. During the boom time of the previous government, Tourism Western Australia had to ask for supplementary funding six years in a row because it did not get a full budget. We are making sure that the marketing budget—and the events budget that supports marketing—is by far the biggest that it has ever been. The mob opposite increased the numbers of full-time equivalents in tourism by 69 per cent. It spent money on salaries rather than on marketing, which is the core function of Tourism Western Australia. The agency is now back performing its core function of marketing the state to bring people here. During the past two years when the number of international visitors to Australia has been going down, we have been holding our own.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Not in international visitors.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: It is a very important and serious part of the market, and it is happening worldwide. The member should visit Queensland to see the decimation of its tourism industry. We are doing much better than Queensland under the current circumstances.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He can't talk.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: That is exactly right.

The second and important part of our initiative to boost tourism in Western Australia is to recognise the importance of cross-government activity. At least 19 agencies are involved in tourism-related activities. It has been my task and desire to ensure that all 12 ministers with portfolios that cover tourism-related subjects are involved. For example, the Minister for Environment and I have been working on the Naturebank project, a project that floundered under the previous government. This government has put it into practice. We have already released the first two Naturebank sites for tourism development. When we look at sport and recreation, and culture and the arts, there has been enormous activity and cross-portfolio activity to ensure that we enhance all opportunities for this very important industry. When we came to government in 2008, the industry was faced with difficulties because of the global financial crisis. We immediately acted on that. I am pleased to say that we are seeing a real return on our investment because of our marketing efforts.