

**Division 42: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Service 2, Tourism —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Tourism.

Mr J. Banks, Executive Director, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr S. Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Ms L. Cassetai, Chief Financial Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr R. Williamson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Under the significant issues impacting the agency on page 698 of budget paper No 2, paragraph 13.1 refers to the project to build new staff accommodation. I have a couple of questions.

Can the minister tell me how many staff accommodation units are expected to be provided under that scheme?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are working through the planning now. The Rottnest Island Authority is engaging with industry on both the planning and the delivery of those units. This is a long-term project, and one of the ideas is to have a long-term program of delivery so that we can continue to support the increase in the number of units. We think that approximately 137 units will be provided, but it will depend on the size and nature of those units. We are working through that process with industry to make sure that we can have them made locally, in Western Australia. We might also have more diversity in the size of the units. The Rottnest Island Authority is consulting with industry and Rottnest Island businesses to understand their accommodation needs. That is being worked through at the moment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are any of the businesses on the island contributing to the project or is all the money from the authority?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** To be honest, across the island there is a range of existing arrangements. Some businesses have built their own workers' accommodation and some have control of and are using existing Rottnest Island Authority buildings. It is a little bit—what is the word—different. There is a range of existing arrangements. Going forward, we want to try to standardise those arrangements. It may be that the government builds the accommodation, but we would need to recover costs from the businesses over time. Like I said, there is a range of arrangements. In one instance, a business built its own accommodation, but it now rents other existing accommodation.

We are trying to standardise the system to release existing Rottnest Island accommodation that is currently being leased by businesses. That existing accommodation can then be rented out to visitors. The plan is to release existing Rottnest Island accommodation for tourists and families, and have a more standardised system that will allow us to recover our costs for the new accommodation over time.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What would be the ambition in terms of a payback period or a time to recover these costs over time from businesses?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are working through the full feasibility and the business case now, or all the financials, because the cost recovery will depend on the cost of delivery. That is why we are working with industry. It will also be impacted, particularly by the size and nature of the existing leases, because, again, no-one has freehold tenure. They have existing lease arrangements. For example, there may be a business with a five-year lease, so we will have to marry, in a sense, the type of accommodation proposed with some of the existing leases.

It is quite complex, but we are trying to standardise not only the type of housing, but also the pricing system so that it is fair and equitable across all businesses. To be honest, as a new Minister for Tourism, the biggest complaint or issue I have had heard from all local businesses is the need for more accommodation. Some great new businesses

have expanded onto the island. As I said, one of the existing businesses, The Lane Cafe, runs The Basin's new food van, and its staff are sleeping in bunk beds in Kingstown Barracks. That impacts that the business's ability to retain staff and our ability to market the Kingstown Barracks as affordable accommodation.

**Ms K.E. GIDDENS:** My question relates to page 198 of budget paper No 3. Can the minister tell me what efforts are being made to ensure the fairness and integrity of the Stay Rottnest online booking system?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have seen incredible demand for accommodation on Rottnest Island. Part of the reason for building the dedicated workers' accommodation is to free up more units, in particular affordable units, for visitors and Western Australian families alike. In December 2022, the authority introduced a new online booking system for accommodation called Stay Rottnest. One reason for that was to try to create a fairer system for those wanting to book accommodation. When bookings open, all customers waiting online are randomised into an order and then they progress in the queue and gain access to the booking system. We have seen incredible demand, with up to 20 000 devices sometimes waiting to register a place.

Security measures are being introduced to try to ensure that we prohibit bots claiming accommodation or getting an unfair advantage, so a new two-step process was introduced to ensure that questions were in place so robots were not in the queue. When the system detects suspicious activity or that the source location of the user is a known bot location, further challenges are issued. This is an incredible statistic, but for the recent open day for January 2025 bookings over 3 316 bots were rejected for suspicious behaviour and denied access to the site. It is quite incredible to think how many bots are out there trying to access the booking system. A total of 3 316 bots were rejected. We continually review the system to make sure that we eliminate these opportunities for people to game the system and then get an unfair advantage. We will continue to monitor that, but it is a very interesting statistic that 3 316 bots were rejected as a result of suspicious behaviour.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[10.00 am]