

NATIONAL PARKS — VISITOR SAFETY

**921. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Tourism:**

I refer to the recent tragic death of a young man, and a separate incident involving a woman found unconscious by State Emergency Service personnel in the Kalbarri National Park.

- (1) What is the government doing to improve safety for the increasing number of visitors to our national parks, including the upgraded Kalbarri National Park?
- (2) Will the minister commit to rolling out a comprehensive safety plan for visitors to all national parks, including those not familiar with Western Australian conditions?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I do not normally represent, but I am happy on this occasion to represent the Minister for Environment, and I thank the member for advance notice of the question. At the outset, on behalf of all of us in this chamber, I extend condolences to the family of the young man whose life was lost at Kalbarri National Park. It was a terrible accident, and we all feel for his family and friends.

- (1)–(2) National parks and conservation areas, like many remote parts of Western Australia and the wider Australian continent, represent a degree of threat to whomever travels through them. That is just by virtue of the environment that people encounter, the nature of many of our remote areas and the likelihood that people will risk passing through those areas in an unprepared fashion. People travelling to remote localities of Western Australia, not even necessarily in the summer months, who are not prepared and do not heed the advice of authorities and departments such as the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, and people who operate the parks and other regions that are not national parks, risk their lives. That is just a fact. It is part of the attraction of Western Australia's remote regions and its national parks. We would not want to remove all risks, firstly because it is impossible, and secondly that would deprive people of the experience—the encounter with nature that they seek by going to these places.

Visitors to national parks are encouraged to plan their visits to these areas and take notice of information provided by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions on its website and in park brochures and signage. I join the Minister for Environment, Hon Stephen Dawson, MLC, in urging people to take care in national parks and elsewhere in the state, and to make sure that they have adequate water supplies following this incidence of suspected dehydration. There have been others in Kalbarri and other parts of the state in recent times. It is a very sad fact that on occasion people have gone unprepared into these locations. We should always take water and other safety measures, such as wearing hats and sunscreen and being aware of the forecast weather conditions. Visitor safety signage in Kalbarri National Park and the park brochure provide comprehensive information about heatstroke, dehydration and dehydration management. Other safety information for the park is provided on the DBCA website.

With respect to the second part of the member's question about a safety plan, the minister advises me that his department has a comprehensive visitor risk management program in place for national parks and other such areas. A lot of the response to the threat of people going into places unprepared for the environment they are about to encounter is not about eliminating risk; it is about risk mitigation and managing risk. People should assess the risk and do everything they can to mitigate that threat. That is what DBCA does. Risks and hazards posed to visitors are addressed through a wide range of on-the-ground mitigation measures, as well as communication through signage, brochures and website information. Online alerts are also provided in the case of emergency such as bushfires and other potentially dangerous conditions.

The government wants people to visit our national parks. I welcome the member's observation that more people are going to our national parks; that is a wonderful thing. I and the government encourage that; however, we always encourage people to be aware of the risks, take the advice available to them and ensure that that risk is mitigated.