

TOURISM — PERTH–JAPAN DIRECT FLIGHTS

599. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Tourism:

I refer to the McGowan government's commitment to growing the state's tourism industry and creating jobs.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Are you having your own little conversation there, member for Scarborough? Start again, member.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I refer to the McGowan government's commitment to growing the state's tourism industry and creating jobs, and its determination to secure more direct flights to Perth.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on his recent visit to Japan and his meetings with Japanese airline executives?
- (2) Can the minister also outline what direct flights between Perth and Japan would mean for the WA economy?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for her question. The recent trip undertaken to Japan I did in the company of the CEO of Perth Airport and an aviation development executive from Tourism WA. When we were in Japan, we were joined by Tourism Australia representatives and executives from the state office in Tokyo. We met with representatives of both Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways. The first evening was a working dinner with Japan Airlines executives as a first meeting to make contact and build a relationship. The next morning we met formally with executives who are responsible for, and capable of, making decisions on new route development. They are the people who are authorised within Japan Airlines to decide upon new routes and have the authority to make those decisions. We met with a range of executives from Japan Airlines. We then subsequently met with the same sort of people—the same level of executives—from All Nippon Airways. We also met with in-country executives from Qantas. I was very fortunate to be able to meet with the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was enthusiastically supportive of direct routes. That evening we met with our great representative for Australia in Japan, the Australian ambassador, His Excellency Hon Richard Court, AC. We had a working dinner that evening with him. He is a very enthusiastic supporter of direct flights and we are well served as a state by his presence.

All those meetings resulted in a few positive indications from both airlines that they see this route as being valuable—because it is. We have not had a direct flight between Tokyo and Perth since 2011. Direct flights are valuable. It is accepted wisdom that if we have a direct flight seven days a week, it equates to 150 000 travellers in a year. That is a significant outcome. Despite the fact that we have not had direct flights since 2011, the market has grown. In the absence of a direct flight, the market has grown by some 53 per cent in that time, which indicates that there is a good demand from business travellers, leisure travellers, students and other types of travellers between Tokyo and Perth. There is justification for this route. In the order of 120 000 people a year now travel between Perth and Tokyo. Both airlines indicated an interest in the route. In particular, JAL acknowledged that this is a route that, were it so unserved anywhere else, it would be extraordinary. It indicated that this is the sort of route that would be taken up as an opportunity. In fact, when Qantas began its seven-day-a-week service to Brisbane, the traveller numbers between Brisbane and Tokyo were only 110 000 annually. We exceed that already. That aside, it is about getting those airlines across the line to make a decision. Airlines are always risk averse. They need a relationship. Japanese airlines, above all else, need a relationship to make a commitment of this nature.

The member for Bicton might be interested to know that we have a bit of ground to make up. Sadly, when I was over there, it became evident that not much effort had been put into re-establishing a direct flight from Japan to Perth. In fact, the last time a Minister for Tourism from Western Australia visited Tokyo was 2012, which demonstrates an utter neglect of the need to build a relationship, to extend respect and demonstrate a desire on behalf of the government to achieve a direct flight. We are going to fix that!