

TOURISM — INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Grievance

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [9.08 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Tourism. I thank the minister for taking the grievance. The latest round of international visitor statistics was released yesterday, which highlighted an unprecedented 10 per cent fall in international visitor expenditure since the McGowan government was elected—the lowest level since 2012. We have seen seven consecutive quarters of zero to negative growth. For the year ending March 2019, we have seen some positive growth in visitor numbers, including holiday-makers, up nine per cent, but at the same time, declines in visiting friends and relatives, down 11 per cent; employment, down 31 per cent; and business, down four per cent. But what really matters to small businesses, tourism operators and the hospitality sector in WA is total visitor expenditure. We are seeing the lowest levels of international visitor expenditure since 2012. There may be many reasons for the dramatic fall in expenditure, which no doubt will be the subject of much analysis, but we know that in addition to spending less, international visitors are staying for shorter periods.

One interesting piece of research from the Tourism Council WA is that it found that only 13 per cent of international visitors to Perth visited an attraction during their trip, which is the lowest of any major Australian city. In highlighting this issue earlier this year, the Tourism Council WA unveiled 16 new attractions for Perth that would encourage visitors to stay longer—that is, stay longer and spend more money. These are innovative proposals—experiences such as a zip-line from Kings Park to South Perth, and thermal baths and a wave park by the Swan River. Together, these new attractions would result in an additional \$165 million spent by visitors in WA and generate over 1 000 full-time equivalent jobs. These exciting projects do not require taxpayer funding but they do require multiple approvals—about 12 to 14 different approvals—from government agencies, as well as government will, to get them off the ground.

We continue to hear and read about example after example of innovative tourism ideas for WA, but businesses are struggling with red tape and bureaucracy, and hitting wall after wall when dealing with multiple government departments. An episode of *Today Tonight* titled “Swan River Red Tape”, which aired six months ago, also highlighted this issue. One example was chopper pilot Brett Carmody, who left WA for New South Wales after spending four years and tens of thousands of dollars on a proposal to create a helipad on the Swan. He said, “There were several rejections, it was devastating every single time, and it just became a massive waste of time, money and man-hours.”

Another case in point is Urbnsurf, a Perth-based company that had the ambitious idea to launch a surf park here in Perth, along with central Melbourne and Sydney. It first launched the concept for Tompkins Park in Melville in late 2016. Urbnsurf Melbourne is due to open in the spring of 2019—a slap in the face for WA, which could have also had its own new \$30 million wave park facility as early as this year if not for the failings of the McGowan government. It is estimated that this project would have injected more than \$250 million into Perth over the project’s life and created more than 300 jobs and 45 full-time positions. This company cannot even get the project up in its home state.

Urbnsurf has spent 10 years seeking approvals and over half a million dollars, only to have the proposal knocked back at the very last post by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. In March 2019, the department rejected a proposal by the City of Melville to utilise a portion of crown land for the project. Now there are very different opinions about whether this was the right location for the wave park, but the major issue is that it was rejected at the eleventh hour after the company had negotiated a long-term lease with the City of Melville. According to Urbnsurf, it was deeply disappointed that it had put so much time, effort and money into this to have it all end at this point. I understand the McGowan government is now working with Urbnsurf to find an alternative site, but the fact that this was not done from the beginning highlights the issues in our state. The Minister for Tourism has said that this was a decision of the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and was not under the tourism portfolio, but the tourism and jobs aspect must be considered.

I also mentioned the proposal for a zip-line from Kings Park. I wrote a letter to the minister about this in April 2019. In his reply, the minister stated that it was the responsibility of the Minister for Environment.

I understand and appreciate the minister’s announcement in May 2019 of a tourism case framework. The minister’s media statement said —

“This new case management approach will ensure projects don’t get bogged down in red tape and will help reduce bureaucratic delays.

...

“It’s also about ensuring that Western Australia offers a range of tourist attractions that encourage people to stay longer and spend more while they are visiting the State.

I was initially very encouraged by this announcement, but the minister's comments during budget estimates that the new tourism framework is simply a "concierge service" that will "elevate the few projects that are deemed significant enough to be a priority of the state in getting them approved and underway" concern me. This will do little to address the experiences of the many smaller businesses and operators who seek to diversify our state's tourism offerings, yet continue to experience knockbacks and red tape.

Minister, this is why I am raising this grievance today. My questions to the minister are: What projects currently before the state government will be assessed under the new tourism framework? How will the tourism framework assist smaller operators with innovative ideas? Finally, the big question is: what is the McGowan government doing to ensure that WA does not miss out on any further tourism attractions, big and small proposals, that have the potential to create jobs and drive tourism growth and spend?

In an article in *The West Australian*, Tourism Council WA chief executive Evan Hall stated —

"Regulatory agencies should take into account the broad community support for these attractions, and the jobs they will create, when assessing proposed new attractions."

I put these questions to the minister in relation to the tourism framework, and I thank the minister again for the grievance.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.15 am]: Member, grievances are not supposed to be a re-run of failed questions in Parliament. When the member's questions fail during question time, a grievance is not an opportunity for the member to write out questions and repeat false claims and misinformation that she failed to convey during question time. The idea of a grievance is to actually raise a reasonable matter in order to get a response from the minister. I am going to reply, in the same way I did during question time, to the member's stupid statement about the international visitor spend.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville!

Mr P. PAPALIA: If the international visitor spend were the only visitor spend going on in Western Australia, the member's claim regarding the amount spent in Western Australia, as revealed in the recent Tourism Research Australia analysis, might be reasonable, but it is not the only spend. As the member knows, during 2018 we had the largest number of visitors to Western Australia in history. The spend in Western Australia increased across all categories of visitors, including travellers inside Western Australia, by \$830 million between last year and this year. The premise of the member's entire grievance is ridiculous and false.

As I said, grievances are not an opportunity to revisit a failed question time and try to get it right this time by writing it out and having a bit longer. The member has a little cheer squad sitting next to her. It is a very small cheer squad.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Vasse!

Mr P. PAPALIA: With respect to attractions, I was on Rottnest Island yesterday. We were turning the sod on the second major infrastructure improvement on Rottnest Island since we took office. This one was the expansion and renewal of Hotel Rottnest. It was very interesting to talk to the Prendivilles about how long they have been waiting to get that project underway. There were seven years of inaction under the former government. It is seven years since the proposal was put to the former government. Four tourism ministers had been responsible for Rottnest Island, but not one of them was capable of making a decision regarding that project. That is why it did not go anywhere. There were four ministers, including the former Premier and the current Leader of the Opposition, but none were capable of making a decision about the expansion and renewal of the Rottnest Island hotel.

What happened when we took office? Premier McGowan said to me, "Get people answers. If proponents are waiting for answers on that island, get them answers." I talked to the executive director of the Rottnest Island Authority and said, "Give them an answer. It does not have to be yes—whatever is appropriate—but give them answers. We will make a decision", and we did. That is why the ecotourism park opened late last year. That is also why we turned the sod on Hotel Rottnest yesterday. That is a \$40 million development on Rottnest Island. Neither of those projects could happen under the previous government because it had ministers incapable of making decisions.

As explained to the member for Vasse during estimates, the case management framework is a significant initiative. It was supported absolutely by the Tourism Council Western Australia. Evan Hall, whom the member referred to earlier, put out a media release applauding the initiative by government. The framework will help proponents of new tourism businesses that are deemed to potentially have a significant impact on the state's tourism industry

navigate the relevant government approval processes. We do not get rid of approval processes or governance obligations. We live in a First World country where we do not get to just knock over trees, destroy environments and do whatever we want. That is a good thing. That is why people come from everywhere else around the world to visit Western Australia. We have the most beautiful pristine environment in the world protected by governance. It does not mean that we get rid of governance, but a concierge service helps small businesses in particular navigate their way through the process of getting their project up and running. Some of them will not be approved. That does not mean red tape is the reason; it means they did not get approved.

The Urbnsurf proposal reached the minister who was responsible for making the decision only about three weeks before he made the decision. He made the decision rapidly. That other process was not his process; it involved a lot of the other processes related to local government and obligations around other governance. The reason a decision was made is fully justified. It was made by the minister and he made it in a timely fashion once he received the proposal. As I understand it, that minister is no longer responsible but another minister is assisting that proponent and it is very happy with the assistance it is receiving to find a new location.

We are assisting with one of the other proposals the member referred to. The hot springs proposal is receiving assistance via the case management framework, but it had received assistance before that. I will not give the member all the other projects because they are being considered and supported by the case management framework. The proponents of those know who they are and they are being supported. Many other projects will be supported anyway. They will receive assistance. These are the ones that are deemed to be strategically significant. It is a good and positive thing. There are not thousands of projects mired in red tape. I am sorry, member; it is just not a thing.