

## **TOURISM FEES — KIMBERLEY**

### *Grievance*

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse)** [9.36 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Tourism. I refer to an article from *The Australian* of 14 August titled “Kimberley tourists to pay fees to visit waterfalls, rock art caves”, which states —

An indigenous group in remote northwestern Western Australia has become the first to charge tourists who want to visit their traditional lands.

The Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation, traditional owners of remote lands and coast in the northern Kimberley region, has started charging cruise ship operators for access to the area’s world-famous waterfalls and rock art caves.

Charter operators who offer boat cruises throughout the area will be charged a one-off \$200 fee per berth, allowing multiple visits by passengers to the tourist spots.

This fee is set to rise to \$152 per individual visitor by 2019, however, to be paid on top of existing fees charged by cruise operators.

Cruise shipping is an important part of Western Australia’s tourism industry generating \$275 million in expenditure in 2015–16 according to Tourism Western Australia, and providing direct economic benefits for the state’s 10 cruising gateway destinations, including the north west and Broome. Growing the cruise sector to optimise economic benefits, especially for regional port destinations, has the ability to increase tourism’s contribution to the state economy to \$12 billion by 2020. Broome has demonstrated a strong commitment to developing cruise shipping for the region and delivered successful visits for 13 superliners in 2014–15. The Australian Cruise Association’s report “Economic Impact Assessment of the Cruise Industry in Australia, 2015–16” estimates these visits equated to \$6.7 million in total expenditure. With a further 17 large cruise ship visits currently scheduled to visit Broome, it is vital to ensure a memorable experience for all passengers by providing a warm welcome and appropriate infrastructure and services. There is an identified need for Broome and the Kimberley in general to offer greater cultural tourism experiences to meet the needs of short-stay cruise ship passengers.

I recently met Mr Chad Avenell, the president of the Kimberley Marine Tourism Association. Its members are concerned about the level of fees for land access charged by the Wunambal Gaambera group and the potential impact this will have on the marine tourism cruise industry. The association’s members are supportive of paying fees for access to Aboriginal land and would welcome and encourage more interaction and cultural experiences undertaken by the traditional landowners. However, there is concern over the exorbitant nature of the proposed fees to be charged by the Wunambal Gaambera group, which have the potential to cripple some smaller marine tour operations.

ABC online news recently reported that Mr Avenell said —

“The members that I represent generally think that it’s a fantastic idea ... We just hope that it comes in at a reasonable rate, so it’s scaled [in a way] that all cruise boats and Kimberley tour operators get their value out of it and can afford to get their payment across.”

Also of concern to marine cruise operators is that if other Kimberley exclusive native title landowners follow suit with fees of a similar level, companies and travellers will be required to pay as many as six native title groups along the Kimberley coastline. Those costs will inevitably be passed onto consumers. These concerns have been echoed by the WA state Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Ben Wyatt, who said, as quoted by the ABC on 13 August —

“Tourism activities, including visitor income from visitor fees, should be an important part of sustained economic participation of Aboriginal people,” ...

“However, the possible implementation of separate systems, on top of the lack of clarity for operators and the potential for excessive pricing, could stymie the growth of this [tourism] industry.

There is a strong need for greater certainty on costs for Kimberley marine tourist operators as well as for a consistent approach to fees that would achieve a fair outcome for marine tourism operators, the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation and other native title groups. The Kimberley Marine Tourism Association has suggested, as one option to be considered, the development of an all-in-one permit for access to Aboriginal communities whose land is accessed by tour operators along the coastline and inland between Broome and Wyndham. I have written to the minister, with a copy to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, providing more detail about this proposal.

Whilst seeking the Minister for Tourism's response to this important matter, I would also like to take the opportunity to again underline the importance of addressing as a priority the outstanding access issues for our cruise ships in Exmouth and Broome, which was central to a recent decision by P&O Cruises Australia to reduce its visits along the WA coastline. Although I acknowledge that a parliamentary committee is currently reviewing the cost of airline flights to Broome, it is also important to take the opportunity to point out that this is arguably the biggest issue affecting the future potential of Broome. I encourage the government to take every action to introduce genuine competition into the domestic airline market. In summary, Broome's potential for growth is challenged by access—port access, access to competitive airfares and now an emerging issue of pricing out the Kimberly marine tourism industry from Wunambal Gaambera lands. I believe this important issue for the tourism industry needs addressing to see the Kimberley marine tourism industry grow and thrive. I ask the minister to give this matter the attention it deserves.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism)** [9.42 am]: I thank the member for her grievance and assure her that the government and I am familiar with the issue. The member referred to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs' comments on the matter. I can confirm that I too met with Chad Avenell and Craig Howson from True North Adventure Cruises on 6 May this year and they raised the issue with me. The history of this matter is that the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation gave the previous government three years' notice of the implementation of this regime. The previous Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was fully aware of the intended visitor management plan, but it appears as though not much action was taken to prepare the wider community, including the micro-cruise ship operators or the superyacht cruises to which the member referred, for the implementation. As a consequence, when it was finally implemented in February this year, it came as a shock to the industry because it had not incorporated the costs associated with the new fee into its cruising operations management process for this year. In fairness to the Aboriginal corporation, it had given notice to the then government. I think what actually happens is that it squeezes the operator's margins. In the member's grievance, she suggested that the cruise operators may pass on those costs. They may but they may not. They may absorb some of the costs and reduce their margins. In any business, in the event that costs go up, operators can make themselves less competitive by passing on all those costs or they can squeeze their margins and reduce their return and thereby not pass the costs on to their customers. It is also a possibility, and I would not like this to be the outcome, that they will go to an alternative destination. All those things are possible, so we should not just assume that the natural consequence is the passing on of the costs. The point is that the change was known to the previous government but I do not think that much action was taken to prepare for it. We may be in furious agreement that the importance of this sector's potential return to the region, to Western Australia and to the Aboriginal community, is significant. We do not want to put that in jeopardy by potentially pricing ourselves out of the market by making the costs too inhibitive.

At the outset, I absolutely recognise the right and the fairness for Aboriginal communities to charge for access to their land and their sites. In acknowledging that point, there is an opportunity to use not only the fees but also this entire market to develop skills and capabilities in those communities so that we get a deeper economy, rather than just the fee charging.

In response to the member's grievance, on behalf of the government I can say that I met with the operators of True North, including Chad, as a representative of that body in the region. After he raised the issue with me in May, I raised it with our Aboriginal affairs minister. The member heard his comments, which I thought were very measured and appropriate. We believe that it is a key sector of the economy. It is a great opportunity for Aboriginal communities and the wider tourism sector in Western Australia. We need to foster it and it needs to be done in a collaborative way. I understand that the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation is receptive to the suggestion that perhaps a Kimberley-wide fee be applied. The corporation made a positive response to that. I urge the parties involved to work together and develop a collaborative approach that benefits everyone and ensures that the industry is not priced out of competition and that we can grow the whole sector.

The member referred to the different values of tourism cruising generally, but I would say that we should not conflate large ship cruising with the sector that we are talking about here, which is predominantly micro-cruisers and superyachts. It is a smaller but potentially lucrative part of the market. I am very supportive of it and the government will be supportive of it. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is taking an informal lead on this issue because it involves Indigenous land use agreements but, clearly, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is taking a great interest in it. There is an opportunity for us to provide leadership in the deliberations between the industry and the communities, and I am hopeful that we will resolve this issue. I share all the views the member expressed about the importance of cruising to the tourism sector and the Kimberley community more broadly. We are working on access to Broome port and, as the member noted, we are working on the exorbitant prices of airline flights to Broome. We are taking action to try to resolve those problems in the near term to the benefit of the entire Kimberley and Western Australian tourism industry and, more importantly in many respects, to the Aboriginal communities that are directly affected.