

TAXI INDUSTRY — COMPLAINTS AND REVIEW

Statement by Minister for Transport

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Transport) [3.02 pm]: I wish to inform members that I have initiated a review of certain operations within Western Australia's taxi industry in light of a growth in passenger complaints to the Department of Transport concerning driver behaviour. The behaviour I refer to ranges from alleged fare gouging to abusiveness and sometimes inappropriate behaviour by male drivers towards female passengers. Complaints referred to the Department of Transport in 2009 numbered 419. So far this year, there have been 484 complaints.

Although I firmly believe that the number of serious complaints about driver behaviour is restricted to a small minority of taxidrivers, I have acted to protect the interests and personal safety of paying passengers and the reputation of the industry itself.

Firstly, I have asked the Taxi Industry Board to immediately review taxidriver training to ensure that appropriate standards are being prescribed and encouraged. Secondly, I have asked the Department of Transport to investigate the introduction of a probationary system for new drivers. If a taxidriver who is a newcomer to the industry is subject to a period of probation—in the same manner as a person qualifying for a motor driver's licence—there will be a greater incentive for that taxidriver to ensure that his or her conduct is beyond reproach. Thirdly, there have been suggestions of taximeter tampering to dupe passengers into paying inflated fares. Although I am assured that this kind of tampering is not possible, I want this verified by an independent source. I have asked the department to seek independent expert advice on this matter. Fourthly, I have asked the department to maintain its program of increased random on-the-spot checks of drivers, which is a very proactive means of addressing driver behaviour and ensuring that drivers are complying with regulations. So far this year, Department of Transport compliance officers have made 4 651 random inspections of taxis. This compares with 3 166 compliance checks in 2009 and 717 in 2008.

This government is committed to ensuring a healthier taxi industry that includes providing a passenger-friendly environment.

Consideration of the statement made an order of the day for the next sitting, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.