

MARGARET RIVER GOURMET ESCAPE

722. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Tourism:

I refer to the state's premier food and wine event, the Margaret River Gourmet Escape, which will return to the south west next year.

- (1) What is the potential for this event to expand in the future?
- (2) Why is investing in events such as the Gourmet Escape important to supporting tourism in WA?

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: Excuse me?

The SPEAKER: No excuse me, just keep going. But I call the member for Vasse for the first time for interjecting.

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: I will start again.

- (1) What is the potential for this event to expand in the future?
- (2) Why is investing in events such as the Gourmet Escape important to supporting tourism in WA?
- (3) Can the minister outline this government's achievements so far in supporting event tourism across WA?

Mr J.E. McGrath interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for South Perth, what did you have for lunch?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I am being savaged by the member for South Perth!

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for the question. We made an exciting announcement today to let people know that, firstly, the Margaret River Gourmet Escape will happen next year with exactly the same format and with the same operators as in the past to give us time to conduct consultation with the local community, primary producers, tourism operators, local governments, and everyone who has an interest in tourism and food and wine festivals in Western Australia to determine a new opportunity for a proposal of interest for a new design of an expanded, bigger and more attractive event than is currently the case. Instead of only one weekend in one location in Western Australia, the event will expand to incorporate both premium wine producing sites in Western Australia—that is, Margaret River and the Swan Valley. It will be extended over two weekends, with the week in the middle.

It will be an opportunity for the state to market outside Western Australia to interstate and overseas visitors so that it can grow visitation. The current format of the Margaret River Gourmet Escape was devised at a time when there was not much pressure on the then government to bring more people into the state by way of tourism. There was no pressure because we did not have capacity in the hotels—they were occupied by people during the mining boom. The former government was sitting back, cruising, relaxing and getting all those royalties and GST and was not having to worry about creating jobs in Western Australia. This government, on the other hand, is in a different environment. The purpose of expanding this event is to enable it to be marketed to interstate and overseas visitors. Rather than spending all its energy on giving a holiday to celebrity chefs and bloggers, the government is focusing on bringing interstate and overseas visitors to an expanded event, growing the opportunity to create jobs and for visitors to come and stay for a longer period of time and getting better results.

The member for Murray–Wellington asked what the government has done since it came to office. We have shifted the focus of tourism from fluffy brand awareness to definitely getting bums on seats on planes coming to Western Australia. That is what we have done. We saved the Margaret River Pro that had been lost by the Barnett government—we brought that back. Initially, that was our first step. One of the first briefing notes I got was that the former government had lost the Margaret River Pro.

We have drawn the Ultimate Fighting Championship event, one of only four such events ever to be held in Australia. It is a huge event, with 15 million pay-for-view customers around the world and 40 000 avid Western Australian fans. That event is going to draw thousands of visitors to Western Australia. This year we marketed the TABtouch Masters series. For the first time ever we have been advocating a significant racing carnival as a tourism attraction. We have used that opportunity to sell to Singapore and Malaysia, our big markets in South-East Asia. We have sold to them another reason to come to Western Australia—affordable, quality accommodation and lots of attractions. We are going to keep doing it. We are going to focus the energies of the tourism agency and we are going to encourage it to use taxpayers' dollars in the most efficient manner possible to get more bums on seats coming to Western Australia and to grow jobs.