

ROTTNEST ISLAND AUTHORITY

Statement by Minister for Tourism

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.08 am]: I rise to update the Assembly on progress made by the Rottnest Island Authority in addressing shortcomings in corporate governance identified by a review undertaken by the Public Sector Commission in 2016. As members may be aware, the commission's review was conducted at the request of the Rottnest Island Authority board due to its concerns with management issues arising at the authority. The commission's governance enhancement initiative, which was completed in September last year, made 51 recommendations for improvement to corporate governance at the RIA. The recommendations addressed many of the fundamentals of corporate governance in the public sector, including policies and procedures for the management of contracts and purchasing; human resource management, including terms and conditions of service for RIA employees; and workforce planning. The commission identified the need overall for a more robust governance framework and arrangements for the RIA generally, including the efficiency of the board and its committees, the contracting out of internal audit and improvements to compliance reporting. The necessary discipline and vigour to implement the commission's recommendations were supplied by a new leadership team led by Ms Michelle Reynolds, on secondment to the RIA from her position as chief executive officer of WorkCover WA. Since Ms Reynolds' appointment in January this year, the RIA has been not only systematically addressing the commission's recommendations, but also examining other opportunities for improvement in the way the RIA carries out its responsibilities.

Some of the recommendations have been addressed through the machinery-of-government reforms announced by the Premier in May this year. Amongst these has been the amalgamation of four government agencies to create the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. This process has enabled some of the RIA's arrangements that were identified by the Public Sector Commission as not meeting the efficiency and accountability needs of the RIA to be streamlined and harmonised with other agencies.

The responsibilities of the RIA are complex. Rottnest Island, also known by its Noongar Whadjuk name of Wadjemup, is one of Western Australia's most notable visitor attractions. It is also an A-class reserve, in recognition of its outstanding environmental and cultural attributes and values. These dual aspects present unique organisational challenges for the RIA, and it is essential that the very highest standard of governance is applied to ensure that the Western Australian community can have confidence in the management of this unique asset. With enhancement of governance arrangements, Rottnest Island–Wadjemup is also enjoying growth in the interest to establish new island-based businesses, including the commencement in November this year of a third ferry operator. Some other publicly funded initiatives that had been stalled, such as the commemoration of the Aboriginal burial ground on the island, have also been revitalised. There is a level of interest and activity now evident on the island that has not been seen in perhaps 30 years. I have asked Ms Reynolds to do whatever is possible to maintain this momentum.

In conclusion, I am sure that members will appreciate the significance of the changes now underway and will welcome the ongoing measures to protect and enhance one of our state's most significant assets. I now table a copy of the report and the Rottnest Island Authority "Governance enhancement initiative" master action plan.

[See papers 668 and 669.]