

TAXIDRIVERS — ASSISTANCE

**376. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the strike action by taxidrivers in regional towns this weekend, and the article in last week's *Albany Advertiser* about the closure of taxi and charter services in Katanning, which follows taxi operators closing down in Denmark, the closure of Rainbow Taxis in the Premier's electorate, and foreshadowed closures in Albany, Bunbury, Busselton and Kalgoorlie. Given the reforms have created significant hardship for taxi operators and drivers in regional areas, what is the minister doing to ensure that the elderly people in these communities who rely on taxis will continue to have access to these important services?

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister for Water, I call you to order for the first time.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

I thank the member for the sudden interest in this issue. After two years of discussion, consultation and debating this, I am glad the member has shown a sudden interest in this issue. What are we doing? We announced last Thursday and Friday a new assistance package, working with existing operators. Of course, there has been a lot of interest already for booking services through regional Western Australia—over 300 are authorised, and we will see the commencement of other services also throughout regional WA. But of course we want to make sure that the existing operators get assistance. That is why we announced \$3.4 million of new assistance in the budget last Thursday. It is \$10 000 per licence, capped at \$100 000. It is a waiver of fees for three to four years. It is also making sure the Department of Transport is working with local operators. I want to ensure that all operators will have a chance to continue. It is a changing environment. We have seen that in industries across the board, and, of course, in the metropolitan area. It is a changing and challenging environment for many. We want to work with the operators, and that is what we are aiming to do.

We have had discussions for over two years with different representatives. The regional operators did not want to be part of the levy, so we did not have the levy. They wanted assistance for the regional tax for the cameras, and we gave them that, and they sought further assistance.

In relation to some operators closing down, the Denmark Chamber of Commerce Inc has been very proactive and is working and holding workshops with other service providers. Operators closed down under the watch of the shadow minister, the member for Scarborough, too. We have seen this happen across the years. We want to continue to work with the operators. We want to give the existing operators the ability to transform into the new environment. Of course what has happened—we saw it with Mandurah and Bunbury—is that without reform, without a change, other companies will come in, just as Uber did in the metropolitan area, and in Mandurah and in Bunbury, and just as Uber was invited by the member for Dawesville into the Peel region —

**Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Without reform, and without providing the ability for the existing operators to compete, they would lose market share, because others would just come in and deregulate themselves. So we had to create a new level playing field. We are working with the regional industry. There are very different views across industry. I know that some really welcome the assistance package, but others want more. We are continuing to try to get that balance right.