

TOURISM PORTFOLIO — MANAGEMENT

Motion

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [5.57 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Minister for Tourism for his gross mismanagement of the tourism portfolio, including intentionally misleading the people of Western Australia on falling international visitor numbers, blaming bureaucrats for his poor decision-making and his range of policies that are causing long-term damage to this important sector.

I will begin by speaking this evening on the back of news today that Etihad Airways has made a decision to withdraw its daily flights to Perth. This is a significant setback for Western Australian tourism. When asked about Etihad's decision, what was the minister's response on ABC radio this morning? He said that he was a little disappointed. The minister should be extremely disappointed, particularly given that he has only just launched a new plan to boost tourism in Western Australia. It identifies that attracting direct flights from overseas to Perth is a key plank in the strategy. The government's two-year action plan includes the following: it will promote Perth as the primary entry point to Australia from the United Kingdom and Europe, and the east coast of the United States, especially leveraging off the Qantas London–Perth direct flights and additional aviation capacity via Middle Eastern airlines. The government will undertake conversion campaigns across key markets as another key part of the strategy, including outback adventures for Germany and Switzerland, and luxury travel from America. The loss of these direct flights serviced by the new 299-seat Boeing Dreamliner offsets the gains made by the former Liberal–National government to have the Qantas London–Perth direct flights using the Dreamliner. It is important to point out that that investment at Perth Airport was a policy criticised by the then Labor opposition, not only for the route, but for the deal itself and the investment in Perth Airport. That is one of the many investments that the former Liberal–National government made in tourism that were criticised.

Just going back to the topic of the Etihad deal, the news we heard today represents an annual loss of about 110 000 seats on direct flights into Perth. The minister said that he was only a little disappointed. As I stated, the minister should be extremely disappointed, particularly about what this means for not only the loss of those visitors coming to Perth, our capital city, but also connecting flights. Abu Dhabi is a transit point to Perth that brings tourists from all over Europe into our great capital city, and the loss of these flights will have a significant impact on WA and WA tourism. Abu Dhabi is a transit point for some of our major tourism markets, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy —

[Quorum formed.]

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, a quorum is present, but I remind you that this is not a case of coming in and then wandering back out again. We need a quorum, so please would you be part of the house of Assembly.

Ms L. METTAM: As I was saying, Abu Dhabi is a transit point to Perth that brings tourists.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would really like to hear what the member for Vasse is saying, but I cannot with all the noise over here.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, it is lovely that you have deemed to stay with this; now can we keep the noise down a bit.

Debate Resumed

Ms L. METTAM: Abu Dhabi is a transit point that brings tourists to Perth from all over the world. It also attracts people from some of our major tourism markets, including the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Scandinavia and Switzerland. The loss of these direct flights to Perth, with the annual loss of 110 000 seats, is yet another failure of this minister and this government. It raises questions about the management of this important portfolio. Many members would be aware that the opposition made an attempt this week to suspend standing orders in relation to the theme we are talking about tonight—figures for international tourists and the information I received when I asked a question in this place about tourism numbers. On 14 March, I asked a specific question of the Minister for Tourism. That was on the back of some of the worst international tourism figures we have seen in this state—figures that are bad when we consider that there has been growth in every other state. In Western Australia, there has been a decline of five per cent in international visitors, while there has been growth in tourist spending in every other state.

Mr P. Papalia: You are talking about spending.

Ms L. METTAM: I am talking about spending; I said that.

If we compare that with other states—in South Australia, there was growth of 18 per cent, even though it has a less sophisticated aviation market. In Tasmania, which does not have direct international flights, there was growth of 31 per cent. On the back of growth in every other state in the value of tourism dollars supporting small business, this is more bad news from this government. When I asked the question to the minister in this house about those shocking statistics, when confronted, the minister said, as part of his answer in relation to a campaign that the government had invested in, that the numbers had increased by 52 417. I quote the minister —

In the months between September and December last year, as a consequence of a campaign that was requested by the industry—we met at our first industry consortia that the Premier hosted in March last year ...

Further he said —

... the numbers increased by 52 417.

However, the figures released by Tourism Research Australia highlighted that international visitor numbers fell from 965 900 to 946 100, that actually being a reduction of 19 800 visitors for the last six months of 2017. It is not surprising that the opposition sought to look into these figures further, because significant and consistent declines occurred in tourism spend numbers over those last 12 months. We also saw a 12 per cent decline in interstate spending. In trying to find out more information about why the minister had come to this conclusion, the opposition put forward some questions through to the Legislative Council. What happened there was quite bizarre in fact. The minister not only lodged an answer, but he also lodged the draft ministerial statement. The department provided draft comments for the minister, and there is quite a difference between what the department drafted and what the minister said when he made a brief ministerial statement in this house. The draft ministerial statement states —

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to share with the house that the campaigns created with that \$2 million have resulted in 52,147 bookings during the campaign period.

When the minister read this out on the floor of the house, he said that it resulted in 52 147 bookings during the campaign period and quoted that it was money spent by these additional visitors. The minister has embellished the information provided by the department, because we do not know whether they are additional visitors. They booked, but we do not know whether they were coming anyway. They are only bookings at this stage. Then when asked about it in the Legislative Assembly, following the brief ministerial statement, the embellishment goes even further. When asked about the number of international visitors, the minister stated that they increased by 52 417 for that period. That is clearly a case of misleading the house. As I said, the minister in his brief ministerial statement said —

The money spent by these additional visitors represents a significant contribution towards our goal of economic improvement and job creation.

By way of his statement, the minister has suggested something that his department was not willing to draft; that is, these visitors not only are additional, but also have come and grown the economy. Who is to say that they would not have booked anyway? We need an explanation of how people who have booked but may not yet have visited and spent in this state would have significantly contributed to the goal of economic improvement and job creation in the economy. It is clear that the minister has misled the house in this way. In answer to the question on the fall in international tourists spending in this state, the minister also had the gall to lay the blame on the former Liberal–National government. The minister stated —

Member, if there is a failure in strategy for international tourism, it is entirely the responsibility of the campaigns that were conducted prior to that 12 months.

This is a frustration in not only the opposition, but also the community. This government has now been in power for more than 12 months and it is now time for it to take responsibility for its policy failures. At the top of the list of concerns with the way in which the tourism portfolio has been managed would have to be the machinery-of-government changes under this government's watch. Before I go to those issues surrounding the machinery-of-government changes, I point to comments made by the then Labor opposition on 28 February 2017, which is available on the markmcgowan.com.au website. It states —

“A McGowan Labor Government will be focused on ensuring tourism is prioritised in everything we do.

One of the first decisions that the McGowan government made in the tourism portfolio was to relegate this department into a major megadepartment and make the role of the CEO in leading the department of tourism a part-time position. The ministry position was certainly relegated as well. We went from the Premier of this state, the most senior role, having the portfolio of tourism, to it going to one of the most junior ministers.

Dr A.D. Buti: I don't think he's that junior.

Ms L. METTAM: He is one of the many ministers who directs that department. He is competing for a voice against the Minister for Agriculture and Food, the Premier, the Minister for Commerce, and the Minister for Science. He is a junior minister in that department. It was evidenced this week when he was asked questions regarding the director general of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. By the mere fact that the Minister for Tourism was unable to answer questions regarding the role of director general, it was clear that he has no control over this megadepartment. I am not raising that concern in isolation. That concern has been repeated time and again by the tourism industry. The consistent message from the industry is that every other state that has tried to make its tourism department part of a megadepartment has reversed the decision afterwards. Victoria, which enjoys about 25 per cent of market share, has invested in Visit Victoria. That is almost at arm's length from government. Visit Victoria has a corporate structure and is much closer to industry. We have a department of tourism, Tourism WA, which is as far away from industry as we can get because it is bundled in with bureaucracy. The director general of the department also has responsibilities for other departments. The minister responsible is only one of several who have direction over this megadepartment.

The role of Tourism WA in promoting our state to visitors is like no other. It is a very unique role. I appreciate that there have been some comments, since the sacking of Stephen Wood, that someone will be appointed in a leadership position under the director general within the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. There is an outstanding need for this department to be at arm's length and to have its own agency and be much closer to industry. I am aware that when in opposition, the now Minister for Tourism raised much concern over the lead marketing role in the former department of tourism. Under this government's watch, that position is yet to be filled. The WA Labor opposition raised such concerns about the marketing and partnerships position, but it is an outstanding need. When growing tourism in this state, it is essential that we look at who is leading tourism in the department with the specialisation and know-how in procuring events and negotiating with airlines. Who will be the individuals involved in the background ensuring that Etihad Airways comes back to WA? Who will be the person involved and directing the agency in grassroots events? It is essential a dedicated and full-time leader is in charge of the agency, giving the agency the direction it deserves. It is essential that the role of marketing and partnerships is a permanent full-time role at the very least. It is a fact that under the former government, the position was to be filled and it is a fact that the WA Labor opposition raised this as a significant concern. Unfortunately, the matter was caught up in the pay freezes at the time, but it is no excuse not to recognise the value of both positions. When it comes to leading tourism in this state and leading the marketing of this state, it is fair to say that we have gone significantly backwards not just in our tourism and visitor spending, which is very clear, with the five per cent drop in international spending against growth across the country. This government is sending a message to the industry about the tourism portfolio by relegating it into a megadepartment, making the tourism role of the chief executive officer a part-time position with other big responsibilities in State Development and by not filling that part-time position.

The government made exactly the wrong response to the worst set of figures the tourism industry has seen; namely, the sacking of Stephen Wood. Stephen Wood, CEO of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation was a man who was very well respected by industry. He had vast experience in mining and was instrumental in getting the Gorgon gas and Wheatstone projects off the ground. He is a man with a distinguished career in state development and with an impossible task. He had to lead not only an agency in state development, he also an agency promoting tourism in this state—two very different areas of expertise. It is understood that no-one knows more about China than Stephen Wood does. It is understood that he was very well connected within the department. He had an impossible task and he was made the fall guy, the scapegoat; he was a distraction from the real issue of these tourism numbers and the direction the department and tourism were going in this state. As I said, it was an impossible task for Stephen Wood to fulfil. We have lost someone competent in this state development portfolio but I believe that this ruthless decision and distraction from the real issues gives this government an opportunity to get things right; that is, do an effective backflip and once again create a dedicated tourism portfolio and a dedicated agency with a full-time tourism CEO.

I have already talked about the machinery of government changes, which have hurt the tourism industry and left many in the sector confused about who was directing and leading the agency. It is absolutely a fair call that if we speak to industry groups we hear a consistent message across industry regarding that.

Mr P. Papalia: From whom?

Ms L. METTAM: At the strategy launch I heard a consistent message.

Mr P. Papalia: From whom?

Ms L. METTAM: I do not have to name names. I do not know that they would be comfortable with me repeating it in *Hansard*. It has been well documented and well versed in the public. There has been consistent concern about the way the portfolio has been managed. Issues have been raised about the megadepartment, and the fact that the two most important positions within Tourism WA are part-time has been a major issue, not necessarily including

the director general of the department. The issue lies at the feet of the McGowan government and the Premier's decisions.

Another issue raised about the way this portfolio has been managed is the sale of the naming rights of the new Perth Stadium. This stops every sport and events commentator from spruiking and promoting our capital city in national and international broadcasts.

Mr P. Papalia: That's not true.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. According to the Tourism Council's economic analysis, the Perth Stadium investment has the potential to attract more than 65 000 new visitors and deliver more than \$29 million and 1 300 jobs to the state's economy through tourism each year, so there is great value in the Perth Stadium investment as a tourism asset. It is a massive contribution to tourism. Again, this investment in infrastructure was consistently criticised by the WA Labor opposition. Did things not change when it came into government, especially at the photo opportunity? Members opposite were all lined up for the photo, talking about how wonderful the tourism asset is, and it is. This investment and what it means for visitations and events that can be hosted at Perth Stadium represents exciting things for Western Australia, in particular the Chelsea match coming up, the Bledisloe Cup —

Dr A.D. Buti: interjected.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes; they are great events secured by the then CEO of Tourism WA, Gwyn Dolphin, who was also sacked by this government 11 months into his contract. Stephen Wood's sacking raises questions about what sort of thought process goes into a decision to sack a director general of a department. As I understand it, questions asked in the upper house recently by a One Nation member stated that the minister thought the director general was very well qualified for his role as director general of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. It was also confirmed that the contract had recently been extended to 2021, so it sounds as though the government has made a kneejerk reaction here as a distraction from the real issue. The real issue is what the government has done by relegating tourism to a mega-department and making the CEO for Tourism WA a part-time position and retaining the leading figure in marketing and partnerships as a part-time position.

Yesterday, the Minister for Tourism was asked about international visitors who study in Western Australia. Although that was an issue that the minister campaigned on during the election—to bring a proportion of international visitors up from 6.8 per cent to what should be 10 per cent.

Mr P. Papalia: Students, not visitors!

Ms L. METTAM: Students, and potentially visitors. Although that was highlighted by the WA Labor opposition, it was also recognised at that time and during the mining boom years that there was a great challenge in attracting international students because of a shortage in student accommodation. Obviously, accommodation during the boom years was very expensive. A lot of those issues are being addressed. We now have a healthy number of hotel rooms available. In some respects, it is a concerning number. Capacity is not an issue anymore and affordability is now there. One of the very first decisions made by the incoming McGowan government was, as a result of its so-called jobs policy, to remove Perth from the regional skilled migration scheme and to change the state skills list from 178 jobs to just 18 jobs. That is the lowest of any other state. By comparison, South Australia—a competing tourism state—has 150 jobs on its occupation list, Tasmania has 160 jobs and Queensland has 45. As a result of this so-called jobs policy, we have seen a 12.5 per cent decline in student visas following the decision to remove those incentives.

An article in *The Australian* on 31 January entitled, "Student slump hits west while nation booms" written by Victoria Laurie, Tim Dodd and John Ross states —

The \$30 billion international education industry has warned that Western Australia is losing large numbers of valuable overseas students to other states following last year's decision by the incoming McGowan Labor government to slash migration incentives.

...

Education agents are now recommending to migration-focused students that they study in South Australia, the Northern Territory or Tasmania, where they can still get the five-point bonus.

The article quotes Phil Honeywood, chief executive of the International Education Association of Australia, who states —

"SA, the NT and Tasmania all celebrated when the WA government withdrew the regional migration points,"

It continues —

Robynne Walsh, the principal of Perth English language school Phoenix Academy, said the government decision had severe consequences. “It is a concern to many in the sector and it’s been devastating because Adelaide is still on the list,”

It was acknowledged in the article that the McGowan government had allocated \$2 million over five years to boost WA’s market share, but compared to the states that are creating more incentives such as Queensland, which has allocated \$37 million over four years and Victoria, which has set aside \$35 million, that is a drop in the ocean. That is a consistent message and response to the policies of the McGowan government. Again, that headline was “Student slump hits west while nation booms”.

The Minister for Tourism has spoken much about the value of these international visitors, with one student representing five international visits. Again, growing international tourism was a big focus of WA Labor in opposition. We asked questions regarding this matter in this place yesterday and the minister said that he had no responsibility over that portfolio. Given the clear connection between tourism and international education and that WA Labor made this issue such a focus at the last election, I would have thought that the minister would be well able to answer any questions regarding the impact of this policy on tourism in this state. Those are a few issues I have raised. I note that the member for Riverton, the Leader of the Opposition, also wants to speak.

First and foremost, the minister has misled the house about tourism figures. We have seen the impacts of the machinery-of-government changes, which have left consistent concerns across industry about who is leading tourism at a departmental level in the state. A professional in state development was made a scapegoat for not being able to lead an entirely different area of responsibility, which is promoting visitors to the state. We have seen another national headline about Western Australian international student figures plummeting while there has been growth in every other state. With those remarks I will go back to the original motion—which I do not have in front of me. Again, I raise concern about the management of the tourism portfolio under the McGowan government.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [6.36 pm]: I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

[Quorum formed.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: That was an interesting contribution from the member for Vasse. I would make one observation. If a member is going to move a motion to condemn a minister, it might be nice if what she says reflects the motion. I notice the member lost the motion at the end and could not find what she had moved, but I will help her out and reread what she said. The motion stated —

This house condemns the Minister for Tourism for his gross mismanagement of the tourism portfolio, including intentionally misleading the people of Western Australia on falling international visitor numbers, blaming bureaucrats for his poor decision-making and his range of policies that are causing long-term damage to this important sector.

As far as I can recall the member contributed not one shred of evidence to support her claim. I will go through them individually. The first one is “including intentionally misleading the people of Western Australia” —

Point of Order

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Excuse me, minister. Do we have a point of order?

Ms L. METTAM: I do not know whether it is a point of order, but I will give it a go! This is private members’ time. We attempted to debate this matter with the government during suspension of standing orders; now the government has been taking up our time by debating the matter for the last 20 minutes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I take your point, but you would want the minister to respond in normal circumstances to an MPI; the minister is giving you a response.

Debate Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am allowed to respond, member. You have made an attack on me. You have accused me! You have condemned me publicly, member!

Ms L. Mettam: You didn’t respond in question time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: You have condemned me publicly. It is only fair that I respond. There has been a ferocious attack on my integrity and I feel obligated to respond as I am allowed to, as I am entitled to, and, normally, as I would be expected to.

With respect to the points that the member has made—she has left the chamber! I place on the record that the member who has made such an outrageous attack on my professional capacity as a minister has left the chamber.

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Time and again the Speaker has ruled that members on this side of the chamber cannot cast aspersions or make reflections on members moving about the chamber and leaving the chamber. I suspect the minister is about to do so and I seek your intervention.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, I cannot rule on a point of order if it has not been made, member for Dawesville. Good try, but, no, not tonight.

Debate Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am sure that the member who made that outrageous accusation against my integrity and then left the chamber will come back shortly, because it would be a cowardly act to make such an attack and to leave the chamber and not enable me to respond to her personally. Nevertheless, I put that on the record.

A number of claims have been made, the first of which is that apparently I misled the people of Western Australia on falling international visitor numbers. I will read the entire extract from *Hansard*, to which the member has referred on a number of occasions when claiming that I misled Parliament. This is what I said on 14 March in response to the member's question, at page 725 —

When we took office, the first industry forum the Premier hosted was with the tourism industry. He sought its advice as to the key issues it confronted. It said things were diabolical. That was in March last year. Things were diabolical.

Mr I.C. Blayney: Things got worse.

Mr P. PAPALIA: This was last year, member, when we won the election in March and you had just lost government —

The industry requested that we take some action to immediately try to bring people from interstate and overseas to this state, and to take action to re-establish a marketing presence on the east coast, which had been shut down six years earlier by the previous government. We did those things. In September, we asked Tourism WA to bring forward and run campaigns in China, Singapore, Malaysia and the east coast to draw people to Western Australia. As a consequence, between September and December —

I said 52 417; I did get that wrong. I guess the member can accuse me of misleading because it was 52 147. It was a slip of the tongue and I got my numbers around the wrong way —

52 417 more people arrived in Western Australia than had arrived over the same period 12 months earlier.

That is an absolute fact. There is nothing contradictory there. I have not even referenced international visitor numbers alone. The member was incapable, clearly, of reading *Hansard*, which is very clear. I talked both of international numbers and interstate numbers, with reference to the 52 147 additional visitors.

Ms L. Mettam: You said additional.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is 52 147. I got the number wrong. It is 52 147 not 52 417. I got that wrong. The member may correct me on that, but I talked about international and interstate visitors. It was not international numbers alone—that is the first point. The second point, for the member's edification, is that for campaigns run on the east coast, when a booking is made electronically through booking agencies, that equals a visitor. When Tourism WA refers to bookings, it means visitors. If the member wants me to arrange a briefing with Tourism WA to explain it to her, I can do that. Louise Scott from Tourism WA will tell her that—bookings equals visitors. When it is an electronic campaign and we track —

Ms L. Mettam: You said additional visitors.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is additional to the 12 months. I will read it to the member again. This is what I said, from *Hansard*; I am reading the whole *Hansard*, not what the person in the member's office might have extracted and put into her briefing notes. I said —

As a consequence, between September and December, 52 417 —

I said 52 417, but it is 52 147 —

more people arrived in Western Australia than had arrived over the same period 12 months earlier.

Who does the member think I sought that advice from?

Ms L. Mettam: You said the numbers increased by 52 417.

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, this is the *Hansard*, it is not what the member thinks I said.

Ms L. Mettam: This is the *Hansard*!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Member, I am going to read from *Hansard* one more time my response to your question of 14 March. At the end of my response I talked about multiple campaigns, both interstate and overseas, in direct response to requests from the tourism industry, and I ended by saying—I am quoting myself, for about the fourth time —

As a consequence, between September and December, 52 417 —

I said that; it is actually 52 147; my staff corrected me on that —

more people arrived in Western Australia than had arrived over the same period 12 months earlier.

I understand that the member might have misread that and assumed that I said something I did not, but that is what I said, so I was not misleading anybody; actually, the member was misleading Parliament when she accused me of misleading. That is the first point. If the member wants me to confirm that visitors equal bookings, I can happily arrange a briefing for her from the marketing manager at Tourism WA.

I go now to the next accusation: of blaming bureaucrats for poor decision-making. When have I ever attributed the departure of the former director general of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to these statistics or any failures in the tourism portfolio? The only person —

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Deputy Speaker, I am not seeking interjections. The member for Vasse can, but not the member for Dawesville.

When have I ever attributed the departure of the former director general of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to these statistics, which are old statistics from December 2016 to December 2017? The only person in Western Australia that I am aware of who has linked the departure of the director general of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to any perceived or claimed failure with regard to tourism statistics is the shadow Minister for Tourism. The member for Vasse is the only person. The member put out a media release claiming that the former director general had been scapegoated over these statistics. I never made that observation, I never made that claim, and I never would. In fact, part of the reason the member did not hear about any perceived shortcomings of the former director general with regard to my portfolios was that I would never do that until the time of his departure. Any considerations around claims of problems within the department, or my relationship with the agency, or the relationship of the director general with the industry, I would keep to be discussed internally between me and the government. I would never say publicly what the member for Vasse has said in a media release. I would never have made that claim. She is the only one who has. I do not know whether it was the member or someone in her office—perhaps the work experience kid—who created with a crayon a graph that the member then tweeted to suggest that there had been a massive collapse in international visitor numbers. The fact that the member put that out and a journalist, without looking into the detail, assumed it to be correct and then wrote an article about it, does not make it true. Does the member know how far the international visitor numbers actually fell between 2016 and 2017? Does she know what the percentage drop was? I am about to let her know. It was 0.8 per cent.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is enough yelling. Hansard is not able to hear who is yelling louder, so can we please just confine this debate to the minister? If he wishes to take an interjection, member for Vasse, that is his preference; that is fine, but it is best not to yell while he is talking.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologise—I was inviting interjections, but I will not now, because we do not have much time. I have only got 10 minutes, and I need to use every second of that 10 minutes.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not inviting interjections; I am speaking through you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Certainly, go ahead, minister.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The fall in international visitor numbers, about which many claims have been made and about which much outrage has been affected on the other side of the chamber, in the year that they are talking about—we were not in government for the entirety of that year—the difference between 2016 and 2017 was 0.8 per cent. That was the difference in international visitation to Western Australia. It was flatlined—it was not good. We knew that, because we inherited a basket case. The previous government neglected tourism.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not inviting interjections. I do not have long; I need every second. Let us analyse the claim that has been made. Firstly, falling international visitor numbers had actually flatlined. Who was responsible for the scale of the notional fall? Let me address that. The way the statistics work, no new statistics have been released this year.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, I call you for the first time. I have warned you.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your protection. I need to explain, because it is not well known, and there has been quite ignorant commentary from the other side of the chamber about statistics. No new tourism data has been released this year—nothing new. What was released was the data from December 2016 to the end of December 2017. It is three months late; in fact it is almost four months by the time it gets out into the public domain. It is extraordinary that we should pay a company through Tourism Research Australia.

[Quorum formed.]

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will continue to reflect on the nature of the responsibility for the flatline in tourism numbers. There was no fall in international tourism numbers for the period being referred to. The period was December 2016 to December 2017. Four months of that 12 months was during the Barnett government. For a further three months, the structure was identical to the one that we inherited, because the change happened on 1 July. For a further three months beyond that—a total of 10 months—the same failed tourism strategy existed.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Deputy Speaker, I am not inviting interjections.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, you are on a call already. I will be very disappointed to give you another one.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Deputy Speaker, I would appreciate your protection; we are running out of time.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Member for Dawesville, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Ten months of the 12 months was under the failed Tourism 2020 strategy devised, implemented—confirmed as having failed by the Auditor General in November last year—and the responsibility of the previous government. The budget that we handed down in September enabled us to change tactics. It freed up funding and enabled us to inject funding into a campaign that focused on, as I said earlier, Singapore, Malaysia, China and the east coast. That resulted in 52 147 additional visitors to the state between September and December.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That was confirmed by Tourism WA, which knows what it is talking about, as opposed to the member for Vasse. The final observation I will make I need to reflect on because the member for Vasse referred to Etihad Airways, an interesting subject to raise during the debate. There was, sadly, a report made as a consequence of a significant commercial challenge that Etihad is facing around the world right now. It made a \$1.9 billion or so loss last year. It is contracting its services all around the world and as a consequence it will not be flying to Perth anymore. We heard the member for Vasse extolling the virtues of the flight and suggesting that somehow tourism in the state will suffer due to less inbound seating capacity. Had the member for Vasse listened a little longer to the radio show, she would have heard me say that there are two other airlines servicing the Middle East flying to Perth, Qatar Airways and Emirates, and we will retain those airlines flying from the Middle East. Qatar Airways —

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is how you say it.

Several members interjected.

Ms M.M. Quirk: He's probably been there, unlike you.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I have been there.

Next month A380s will commence that route by Qatar Airways. As a consequence, there will be an initial thousand seats a week flown by that airline. When we couple that with the direct flights from Qantas and even after the Etihad flights cease, there will be 116 672 additional seats flying into Perth next year as opposed to last year. Even last year when we had Etihad, once it stops as a consequence of the additional seating on other airlines, fortunately for Western Australia we will have 116 672 additional seats servicing the Perth market.

Mr I.C. Blayney interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Geraldton!

Mr P. PAPALIA: We do not have a shortage of capacity flying from the Middle East. I do not like it when airlines choose through their own commercial reasons to cease flying, but that is not where we are targeting direct flights. That is not the location that we are pursuing to establish ourselves as the western gateway. We already have a reputation as the western gateway there. We are well serviced by other airlines from the Middle East. We are focused laser-like on seeking additional direct flights from China. As we speak, the chairman of Tourism of Western Australia is leading a delegation. I shared this with the courtyard last night. The chairman of Tourism WA, an excellent man, Nathan Harding, is leading a team from Perth Airport and Tourism WA. The member asked who will be negotiating direct flights. I can tell her right now that the chairman of Tourism WA is in China negotiating with China Eastern Airlines. He has with him the aviation development managers from Perth Airport and Tourism WA. They will come back to us, I hope, with proposals from China Eastern to commence direct flights in the near term. We will negotiate around its response.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, I have been struggling to hear the minister over the conversations on my right. Please keep it a bit lower.

Point of Order

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Madam Deputy Speaker, the minister called the point of order not from his chair. I ask that you bring him to order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It was not a point of order. I was not addressing it as a point of order.

Debate Resumed

The SPEAKER: Given the time, I interrupt this business.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
