

MINISTER FOR TOURISM — INDIA VISIT — DIRECT FLIGHTS

Statement by Minister for Tourism

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.10 am]: I wish to inform the house that last week I took representatives from Perth Airport, Tourism Australia and Tourism WA—now known as Team WA—to New Delhi and Mumbai to pursue the opportunity of a direct flight between Perth and India.

During this visit, we met with key Indian airlines and distribution partners and other Australian and Indian business representatives, and the CEOs of Delhi and Mumbai airports, as well as state and federal ministers, including the federal Minister of State for Civil Aviation, the Honourable Jayant Sinha; the Honourable Governor of Maharashtra state, Shri Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao; the Honourable Chief Minister for Maharashtra state, Shri Devendra Fadnavis; and the Minister of Tourism for Maharashtra state, Mr Jaykumar Rawal. I also met with Australia's High Commissioner to India, Ms Harinder Sidhu, and I thank her and her team for their support.

India's economic and demographic indicators point to it being a market of huge potential. It is estimated that by 2025 there will be 13.9 million international leisure departures from India, generating 19.4 million Indian visitor arrivals overseas. International holiday travel will be driven by a predominantly younger, online-savvy generation of travellers seeking to discover iconic destinations, create new adventures and travel more independently than their families have ever done, and their travels will be fuelled by rising incomes.

The Perth to India market is currently 145 000 two-way passengers, and this has grown on average by 12 per cent over the past five years. The traffic is well balanced between Australian residents, 60 per cent, and Indian visitors, 40 per cent. However, Indian visitors are growing at a faster pace, with an 11.7 per cent increase from last year. This year to date, Indian visitors arriving to visit friends and relatives increased nine percentage points to 50 per cent of visitor traffic as the Indian diaspora in Perth continues to grow. Tourists from India currently make up 12 per cent of the visitor traffic.

The key enabler of further activating the Indian tourist market is direct air access. With traffic volumes between Perth and India now reaching a certain threshold, new aircraft technology and no other direct airline competition, Perth is emerging as an important new destination on the map of Indian airlines. The meetings held with airlines were positive regarding this opportunity; however, there is work to be done. We are playing catch-up after nearly a decade of no action in this market. Following similar experiences in China and Japan, where we are also seeking to secure direct flights, I understand that I was the first WA Minister for Tourism to lead discussions with the Indian aviation industry. The level of awareness about our fantastic state and our wonderful attractions is therefore limited. Aside from the cricket match between Australia and India to be played at Optus Stadium this December, the challenge exists to position WA as a key tourism destination for Indian travellers. This will not be an easy task, but the Team WA approach gives us the best opportunity to secure a direct flight and increase our market share.

Team WA will now prepare detailed business cases for the airlines and progress these discussions alongside the development of a destination awareness campaign.