

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 3, 5 to 7, Tourism; Hydrogen Industry, \$233 141 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Tourism.

Ms J.J. Shaw, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Tourism.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms D. Belford, Managing Director, Tourism WA.

Ms R. Lowe, Executive Director, Destination Development, Tourism WA.

Ms S. Doherty, Executive Director, Events, Tourism WA.

Ms C. Turnbull, Executive Director, Industry, Aviation and Markets, Tourism WA.

Mr C. Clark, Deputy Director General, Resources and Project Facilitation.

Ms C. Cherry, Executive Director, Infrastructure, Planning and Economic Development.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Tourism.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has quite a team there—very impressive.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I know; I need help.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 202 in budget paper No 2, volume 1, significant issues impacting the agency, and the line item “WA Jobs Taskforce”. Although ongoing job creation is vital, can the minister highlight in the budget whether a proportion of the funding is to be allocated to tourism; and, if so, how that will be used to fill the gaps for many businesses struggling with a staff shortage, which is impacting their businesses financially, physically and mentally? We hear a lot about the shortage of agricultural workers, but what is the plan for attracting workers to small businesses in the tourism industry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. First of all, I note that the member referred to a range of matters affecting the workforce in the industry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about job creation and workers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, indeed. I can report to the member that the McGowan government recognises very much the importance of the tourism industry to the economic wellbeing of the state. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the industry in a range of ways. Campaigns have focused on intrastate travel, and big numbers of Western Australians have moved particularly into the regions. As the member would be aware, his electorate has had large visitation numbers. That has been welcomed, particularly by various elements of the sector—accommodation and caravan parks. Those sorts of tourism supply product have been very well subscribed. However, a number of tour operators, particularly those that provide tours and experiences, have not necessarily been as well subscribed by visitors.

In terms of gaps in the workforce, we know that there is a shortage of a variety of workers across the hospitality and tourism sector, including chefs. In various parts of the regions, the stresses and strains vary. In the north west of the state, in towns such as Broome, there are staff shortages. There have been staff shortages across the spectrum of providers, be they hospitality, beverage providers or restaurants. Accommodation providers have also had a shortage of cleaning staff, for example. The government has been very successful in marketing these regional areas to Western Australians, but the challenge has also been to provide a workforce to cater for demand. In destination Perth, it is a different scenario. In the tourism sector, the occupancy rates of hotels in the CBD has been down, but there is still an increasing demand for key skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Tourism WA in particular has been undertaking a number of initiatives. These initiatives include programs linking available workers directly with employers and encouraging the selection of tourism and hospitality vocations by school leavers. Tourism WA and other players in the sector have been engaged in some work. FutureNow is a series of activities over the next two years aimed at delivering programs promoting careers in hospitality and tourism to high school students. There is an in-school chef ambassador initiative. A SkillsWest careers expo was held last month, in August 2021. The agency is also delivering a hospitality job connect program. This program focuses on the regions and on local jobs for local people by offering five-day, fast-track, high-energy theory and practical hospitality courses. Participants who complete those courses are linked to jobs on the final day of the course. Those courses have shown some pleasing success. Two courses have been held—one in Kununurra and the other

in Geraldton. Five more are scheduled to take place in Broome, Margaret River, Peel and Albany over the next couple of months. A number of local government authorities are also looking at innovative solutions to address those issues. The Shire of Esperance is an example. It converted an unused youth hostel into workers' accommodation. The government and the agency recognises the importance of work in this area and of course continues to work to address workforce demand.

[3.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not think that any government campaign has contributed to tourism in WA. The mere fact that Western Australia is closed off to the rest of the world and to the rest of the country is why internal tourism is occurring. When it comes to the workers who are needed in the north west, businesses have a task ahead of them. Exmouth, which traditionally has a population of 2 500 people, is experiencing in the order of 20 000 tourists a day. Exmouth is one example; others are Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Coral Bay and Broome. As we go around the state, pretty much the whole of regional Western Australia is suffering. We are not talking about a couple of people here and there; we are talking about small businesses in the hospitality and tourism sectors needing thousands of workers. Much like what is happening in agriculture, there is a need for workers now to be able to take advantage of the number of people who are travelling around Western Australia. What is the government doing to look at opportunities to bring workers, perhaps from the east coast—as long as they adhere to quarantining and whatever else is needed to make sure they come over here in a safe manner—to alleviate the pressure that businesses are under, particularly in regional Western Australia? Hotels are unable to find workers to clean the bedsheets. Owners of pubs, cafes and restaurants cannot keep opening up day after day.

Some businesses rely on whale shark tours. It is not all beer and skittles for everyone. There is a two or three-speed tourism economy out there, but when it comes to key business owners, they are financially, physically and mentally stuffed, and they need help. They need the government to work out strategies to get workers from over east. If those workers can be found, will the government provide workers' accommodation to cater for the workforce? There is no accommodation for anyone in these towns, let alone the workforce that is required to look after those visitors. What is the government doing to address not only the workforce that is desperately needed, but also the workers' accommodation that needs to go with that? When we hear about hotels being full, at best they are at 80 per cent capacity because hotels are utilising their own accommodation for their workers. They are not getting the maximum benefit from the number of people who are travelling around regional WA. What is the minister doing to action these problems?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That was a long question. I have outlined a range of short, medium and long-term programs. A solution to this challenge lies across short-term, medium-term and long-term structural change. The Premier and the Minister for Education and Training hosted a Skills Summit about a month ago. One of the direct outcomes was of course a targeted marketing campaign to interstate workers. Work on that continues. As the member well knows, to keep the state safe we have a policy with regard to the current border situation with New South Wales and Victoria. That very important policy is focused on ensuring that we keep out, as best as possible, the likelihood of the Delta variant entering the state. That marketing campaign will continue to focus on attracting interstate workers. Work has already been done and some states, such as South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory—particularly the Northern Territory—are not subject to the current border arrangements. Work continues on attracting those Australians.

The member's second question related to backpackers and visa holders who are already in Australia, and are already in this state. There are already formal and informal collaborations with regard to those workers becoming available as the season changes from a focus on the north to the south, for example. Some innovative businesses are already looking at how to take advantage of those workers who might be in the north of the state. As we know, when the season concludes there, those workers can move to the southern regions, particular around the south west.

In respect of education and training, this government is investing record amounts of money in the training sector through TAFE. Included in that, of course, is a key focus on hospitality and tourism-related skills training. That will be a focus. That will be more of a medium-term effort. Because of caps on the number of international travellers who can enter the state, and those who can afford to enter Australia, the reality is that those numbers are not entering the state or the country. However, a number of visa arrangements have been made. The request from our sector continues to be that consideration be given to some skill sets that will address some of the vacancies.

I was in Kununurra earlier this year and met with a number of operators, including hospitality and accommodation operators. As part of negotiations with the commonwealth, they were able to get workers from Vanuatu and Fiji. The accommodation aspect in their case was caravan parks, and that was causing some tensions because, understandably, caravan park owners wanted to maximise yield on their caravan sites and had locked in, if you like, some of the demands of worker accommodation. This is an ongoing issue, and we are working at it from a range of levels to address the short, medium and longer term demands.

[3.20 pm]

On the topic of national arrangements, I had a phone hook-up only six or so weeks ago with the federal Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and the tourism ministers from the other states and territories. Martin Ferguson is doing some work focused on the way forward for the broader tourism industry in Australia. One of the things that he clearly highlights is the issues around workforce development and training; the cultural nature of tourism and hospitality; and the fact that we have relied, and continue to rely, on a lot of foreign workers to fill the positions that many Australians choose not to do as a career path—or, if they do, it is a short-term career path for them. Those issues will have to be addressed in the longer term.

I assure the member that we are in a situation that is not uncommon in other jurisdictions, but our tourism industry is in a much better place. I do not agree with the member that campaigns like Wander Out Yonder have not increased visitation in regional Western Australia. A natural willingness to be tourists or to venture out is quite innate in Western Australians. The Wander Out Yonder campaign has been highly successful and many regional economies are directly benefiting from that.

We want to make sure that when we come out of this COVID pandemic, we have a more robust industry that is able to respond to the ebbs and flows and demands of supply into the future, and also be ready, of course, for when we can welcome normal numbers of people from interstate and overseas.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can I ask you to clearly relate your question to a page number, item, program or amount in the volumes, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is further to the question I originally asked.

The CHAIR: As long as it relates to —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I am talking about the WA Plan for Jobs, and tourism. I thank the minister for that longwinded answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was a longwinded question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Mine had lots of facts. Perhaps Tourism needs to get on the ground and hear what businesses have to say.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can you please ask a question relating to an item number.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In relation to jobs, is the department, or the member as a minister in the government, looking at ways to have a campaign to get workers from the east coast to come here and work and holiday?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I just answered the member’s question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We understand that the Perth tourism market is suffering significantly at the moment compared with the market in other parts of Western Australia, like the north west. Is the minister looking at a campaign whereby we can get those from the east coast to holiday here? Perhaps the government can—as part of its \$5.6 billion surplus—put its hand in its pocket to pay for some of those people to come across and stay one, two or three nights in Perth before they go north to work. Is the minister looking at any incentives to entice people to come over here to work and holiday?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In answer to the question, a range of measures that I have already highlighted are focused on that. Essentially, we want to encourage people to come and work in Western Australia and live here. That is one of the reasons the government has its fly-in fly-out workers policy, for example. We think this state offers a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to relocate, and we will continue to market to the eastern seaboard in innovative ways, which are evolving, to attract people to a range of industries, including, of course, the tourism industry, to address gaps in the workforce.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to line item 6, “Event Tourism”, in the service summary table on page 206 of budget paper No 2. With over \$52 million allocated for event tourism, can the minister outline what support is being given to regional events?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. I thank the member for Geraldton who, like a number of regional members, supports and encourages a range of events. There is no doubt that events play an important role in visitation and attraction, but they also play a key and significant role in the celebration of community. Western Australia has a great diversity of events that are supported by the government. Funding of \$52 million is allocated to event tourism. That delivery varies from region to region and from community to community. I am very pleased with the value that we get for that investment. Indeed, I think it has a great impact on the local communities and for those who might be visiting those communities during those festivals and events that are supported by government through that allocation. It makes that very special.

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As the member would be aware, the scheme is an annual funding round. It allows for smaller and developing regional events across WA to be funded. We also have the regional Aboriginal events scheme, which focuses on Indigenous opportunity and experiences that involve and nurture and support strong leadership and participation from Aboriginal people in regional WA. There are 62 regional event scheme events, including five through the regional Aboriginal events scheme. The regional events program supports medium to larger regional events. I think the member's locality has examples of a number of those. They include Ironman WA, the Cape to Cape MTB—a mountain bike ride—Ord Valley Muster, and Shinju Matsuri in Broome, through to Taste Great Southern, the recent CinefestOZ—a film festival in the south west particularly focused around Busselton—and Mandurah Crabfest.

One of the things this government has done through the culture and arts portfolio is the Getting the Show Back on the Road WA program. That is a risk-share program administered by the department. It is specifically aimed at supporting and reinvigorating the live entertainment performance industry, and it is focused on covering any potential ticket revenue loss. It has been a very well subscribed and well-targeted program for ensuring that events can take place. We have extended the Getting the Show Back on the Road WA program. It is supporting, for example, a number of agricultural shows. We are in the middle of the agricultural show season, with the Royal Show starting soon. In regional WA, lots of the agricultural shows are eligible for consideration under Getting the Show Back on the Road. Events tourism is very important. Western Australia continues to build itself a reputation for high quality events in both metropolitan and regional WA, and this government is funding it to over \$52 million in this budget.

[3.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: How much did the government have to provide to IMG, now that the Western Australia Gourmet Escape has been cancelled?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member is aware, unfortunately the organisers announced late Friday afternoon that the proposed Gourmet Escape event for November 2021 was not able to be held this year. We will keep working with IMG. The member would probably be aware that there was a rollover of the funding that was committed to last year's event to ensure that this year's event could be held. Tourism WA will continue to work with the organisers of Gourmet Escape to see its return in 2022. I think it is a good event. Obviously, there were proposed changes to the event in 2019 and the 2020 event could not be held either. It showcases the remarkable food and wine of our regions and it is an important event.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, how much did the state government have to provide to IMG?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member can appreciate, the figure is commercial-in-confidence because it was an arrangement made, but the support from when there was a cancellation last year was rolled over, and I would expect we will do the same for the 2022 event. I cannot give the member the figure because it is commercial-in-confidence.

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to the remainder of that figure, the government provided a portion of funds to IMG, I imagine, and there would be a remainder of funds that would not be spent this year on the Gourmet Escape, because it did not go ahead. As the Gourmet Escape did not go ahead, what is the accountability around those unspent funds and will they be put into another home-grown event or dedicated to event tourism?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Let me be very clear: the 2022 event with IMG will be worked on closely with TWA to ensure that next year's event can take place. Obviously the staging of that event will be negotiated, but we will have an event, and that is important, and there is money in the budget for that event to take place. I cannot disclose the exact contracted amount, because it is commercial-in-confidence, but I assure the member that the negotiations to have an event next year, given that this year has been cancelled, will be negotiated with IMG.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the funds that are not required this year just go into consolidated revenue?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The reality is that we have funding of \$52 million. Of that, an amount would have been allocated under the commercial agreement with Gourmet Escape. That is not happening this year; that will be rolled over. The fund allows for some flexibility for other events to be considered. That is the nature of having an amount of money for events. The total amount is not allocated because we have different events that might emerge in the future.

Ms L. METTAM: What led to the event being cancelled? Was there any discussion about modifying the event? I know that some local operators had talked about the event having a more Western Australian feel in terms of the way the event was hosted. We know there are different ways to facilitate important events such as football games. Was there any opportunity to ensure that event could continue?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The media statement from IMG indicates there were a range of issues. COVID-19 obviously impacted the attendance of some of the guests, some of whom were international. From memory, Rick Stein resides in Cornwall in the United Kingdom and was a big name, along with some of the other signature chefs, if you like. IMG made a commercial decision not to hold the event in November. I am sure a range of considerations ultimately

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led it to make that determination, but I think one of them was the uncertainty over the signature chefs being able to attend the event. The government accepts IMG's commercial decision; it is its decision. TWA will work closely with it in the coming period to plan for an event for next year. From memory—Saskia may be able to answer this—my understanding is that there is a contracted period over a certain number of years. I will ask Saskia Doherty to clarify whether that is true.

Ms S. Doherty: Just on the point around events this year, IMG will work with all the existing event venues to encourage them to still run their own events, and a fringe event program. It will promote the fringe event program to travellers to encourage them to keep their bookings, and Tourism WA will support them in those efforts. We have a two-year extension option on the current agreement.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 202 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the allocation for renewable hydrogen under "Spending Changes", and also to paragraph 5.1 on page 203. What is the \$892 000 for renewable hydrogen being spent on?

[3.40 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am referring to implementing Western Australia's renewable hydrogen strategy. The member referred to an amount of money.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It was \$892 000 in 2021–22, rising to roughly \$1.7 million in 2024–25 of the forward estimates. It is the fourth-last line item at the bottom of the table on page 202, "Renewable Hydrogen".

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The budget provides \$40 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development activation. It also provides \$10 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development in Western Australia. The first amount is focused on the midwest for hydrogen refuelling infrastructure incentives for the transport sector to adopt hydrogen vehicles, as well as transmission network upgrades, including a water desalination plant and storage, and also to conduct a feasibility study into local manufacture assembly or maintenance of electrolyzers to support the domestic renewable hydrogen industry. The budget also provides \$10 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development in the state. This includes the identification and establishment of a metropolitan back-to-base hydrogen refuelling facility, the provision of incentives for the road transport sector to adopt hydrogen vehicles, and a co-contribution to the conversion from diesel to hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles for local government waste vehicle fleets, regional school buses, and light commercial and heavy haulage vehicles. The funding of \$892 000 in 2021–22 is for staff in JTSI's hydrogen unit. That will provide for approximately 10 full-time equivalents in that hydrogen unit within the agency.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister able to tell me where in the budget those \$40 million and \$10 million line items reside? I could not track them down. That was one of my follow-up questions.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I think we can. I will try. I understand that \$54 million will support increases to the resources devoted to hydrogen activities. I highlighted the two key amounts of that \$54 million. The member wants to know the line item in the budget. This money is held in Treasury-administered funding. It appears in that entity. I will ask the director general to respond.

Ms R. Brown: The \$50 million comprises, as the minister outlined, \$40 million for activation for the midwest but also \$10 million for demand stimulation. That funding is held in a Treasury-administered item.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That appears where—in Treasury?

Ms R. Brown: Yes, in the Treasury estimates.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question relating to that. An announcement on that funding was made on 7 September. That adds up now. There was a \$7.5 million commitment to kickstart the development of Oakajee's strategic area as a renewable hub. What is that \$7.5 million for, please?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The \$7.5 million for the Oakajee project is part of the investment to fast-track job creation at Oakajee. It is an election commitment. That \$7.5 million includes moneys for an access road and junction with the North West Coastal Highway as a first step towards activating Oakajee. The government is continuing to take action to accelerate the activation of Oakajee. It has appointed Mr Richard Mann to prepare a business case to support the government's next steps. This will be informed by an expression of interest process. In the broader context, the government clearly has a view that WA can position itself to build on its comparative advantages to establish a competitive renewable hydrogen industry. It is an important commitment that is also supported by an election commitment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have any businesses indicated that they will be establishing their hydrogen-producing operations or downstream processing from hydrogen at the Oakajee estate, across the forward estimates?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Mr Clark to respond.

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Mr C. Clark: No specific projects have come forward yet through the EOI process. There was a really positive response to the EOI for Oakajee. We are continuing to work with some of those companies. They will feed into the business case process that we are doing with Richard Mann. I guess we are looking at all the configurations of how we can activate Oakajee and what the different projects can bring to it. It involves a bit of matchmaking to try to get production with offtakes and that type of thing.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will just add that Minister MacTiernan as the lead minister on this is very focused on ensuring that a renewable hydrogen industry can flourish in WA. She is working very hard on that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have those industries that responded to the EOI indicated what other support, including infrastructure, they would require the state to provide for those projects to go ahead?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The answers to those sorts of questions will be borne out through the work of Mr Mann, who has been appointed. He will have a key role in stakeholder engagement and these important questions. Any consideration will be part of his work and will be informed by the EOI process and other stakeholder engagements that take place.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question. Perhaps the minister has partially answered it. Are any plans currently afoot to build any other enabling infrastructure for the hydrogen industry at Oakajee?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Oakajee has been identified as a key site for such development of sustainable industry. That ongoing work will be led by the minister and supported by the resourcing that is provided in the budget, including the election commitment, to make sure that everything possible is done to establish such an industry at Oakajee, and of course benefit the state more broadly.

[3.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the government talked about or indicated that there will be any tax put on hydrogen or state agreements to facilitate this new industry in Western Australia? Has that been spoken about; and, if so, what have the conversations been around taxing hydrogen or perhaps having a state agreement in place to secure this emerging industry that is clearly going to benefit Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not going to make comment on matters that are a consideration for the minister, but I can assure the member that our minister is absolutely focused on ensuring that hydrogen is given every possible chance to play a significant role in the future energy mix. She is gung-ho about it, and is having a range of conversations with many stakeholders, but she is particularly focused on making sure that our election commitments are delivered and that something finally does happen at Oakajee, because it has taken a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So you are out of the loop.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just on the subject of renewable hydrogen, one energy source for renewable hydrogen is geothermal energy. A proponent who is looking at establishing a geothermal facility has apparently been told that there will, in fact, be a royalty applied to geothermal energy, and they have indicated that that will make the hydrogen produced from geothermal energy uneconomic compared with natural gas. Is the minister aware of that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not personally aware of that, but again, as I have highlighted, we have election commitments regarding the development of sustainable hydrogen energy. We have an absolutely committed minister focused on doing that and we have resources in this budget to support initiatives that are focused on achieving that. We have also appointed a person who will have specific responsibility for working through a range of issues as we take advantage of this opportunity for Western Australia.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does the minister think it would be appropriate to apply a royalty to geothermal renewable energy?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is not in my field of expertise, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 211 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the heading “Tourism Destination Development”. Can the minister elaborate on what is funded under tourism destination development? There is approximately \$11 million allocated here for 2021–22. Will this include much-needed tourism development in respect of workers’ accommodation in places like Broome, Exmouth, Coral Bay, Shark Bay and Kalbarri?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. As I said before, each state continues to face similar challenges in worker accommodation and housing. There is a range of measures that I have highlighted previously with regard to how the agency and the government is responding to that. There is a range of projects that I think will bear fruit, some of them faster than others.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister highlight one and elaborate on that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I highlighted one of the projects that has fast-tracked workers into areas of shortage. One was in Broome and one was in Geraldton, from memory. There is also the ongoing work done by other agencies

and other aspects of the sector, including the Australian Hotels Association, which is pursuing some industry-led initiatives. As I said to the member, this is a challenge that needs to be approached in a multilayered way, and we are focused on working with the industry to address the challenges. We are not on our own, because this is taking place in all other states and territories, as we know.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Regarding the \$11 million allocated in this budget under “Tourism Destination Development”, is the minister’s agency the lead agency for workers’ accommodation, or for providing financial support to chambers of commerce or local governments to address the dire need for workers’ accommodation? Are those funds there to assist the communities that need workers’ accommodation, yes or no?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member needs to know what the purpose of the actual fund is —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I asked that question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fund focuses on a range of initiatives that are about the development of tourism. It covers areas around Aboriginal tourism, the Camping with Custodians projects, enhanced experiences, tourism attraction, case management and a whole range of other matters that that \$11 million is committed to. The issues around workers’ accommodation, of course, are being experienced in a range of other portfolios, not just tourism. It is my understanding that an amount of \$350 000 has been committed to specifically address workforce issues in that allocation, but that allocation is a broader commitment.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is saying that workers’ accommodation is not part of that \$11 million for tourism destination development. Is he also saying that it does not cover the need for power, water, sewerage, telecommunications and mobile data? These are the areas in which these towns are suffering because of the numbers of tourists. Is the government’s tourism destination development fund going to cater for any of those issues that are currently affecting tourism businesses and businesses in general? Will any of that \$11 million go towards assisting that, or towards highlighting the issues to other responsible agencies? Will this fund help to highlight the desperate needs of these communities?

[4.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fund is there to deliver some tourism-focused initiatives. Issues around power supplies, for example, are clearly important. The member will be aware of the experiences in Kalbarri as a result of cyclone Seroja and some legacy power issues. Before the end of the year, there will be a major upgrade to Kalbarri’s power supply, for example. I recently received a letter from a Kalbarri tourism business, highlighting its challenges with the power supply. Those are being addressed across government, through the specific agency—Minister Johnston’s portfolio. I assure the member that the needs of businesses, particularly regarding tourism, of which there is a broad spectrum, are highlighted and raised with other ministers so that we can have a whole-of-government strategy to respond to those challenges. In Broome, for example, some major election commitments have been focused on enhancing the tourism infrastructure there, whether it be boat ramps or streetscapes, of which some very successful work was done in the Chinatown area. They did not come out of the tourism budget per se, but they came out of other budgets that have a direct and positive impact on visitation and the tourism industry more broadly. We continue to raise matters when enhanced opportunities for visitors will benefit the local community and will benefit, of course, the local economy. There have been some very big successes by this government in terms of election commitments. Obviously, the agency, Tourism WA, works very closely with a range of other agencies and authorities to enhance the visitation infrastructure and experience and will keep doing that. Local government plays an important role, for example, in the provision of services and amenity to not only the local people but also to visitors, and we support that wholeheartedly and will continue to do so.

The CHAIR: Before you speak, member for Collie–Preston, it is four o’clock with five divisions to go. I needed to point that out.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I refer to the spending changes table on page 202 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Aviation Recovery Fund” under “COVID-19 Response”. Can the minister please explain how this funding will be applied?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I can. I will also ask my parliamentary secretary to make some comment, particularly as she was chair of a parliamentary committee that inquired into the issues around aviation, particularly regional aviation. More briefly, the line item the member referred to is an important consideration. Aviation access has been greatly affected by COVID travel restrictions, which has reduced passenger demand and airline capacity. As the member will be aware, being a regional member, the state’s tourism sector is particularly dependent on airline capacity to enable visitor access. It is important to know that more than 93 per cent of our international and domestic visitors arrive into Perth by air—a very significant figure. To support that, there is funding of \$25 million to Tourism WA over the next two years, which will enable negotiation and securing of aviation services. It will allow the exploration of any opportunities of new air routes as airlines begin to designate aircraft to access routes across

their network over the coming 18 to 24 months. I ask, Chair, if my parliamentary secretary can make some comment on this matter given her experience in the inquiry.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Thank you, minister, and thank you, member, for the question. Clearly, international air routes will be vital to recovery post-COVID. The state government keenly appreciates their importance; in fact, we have been heavily engaged with the major international airlines that currently service Perth Airport and would like to thank them for their ongoing engagement with the state government. It is vitally important that we recommence those destinations as quickly as possible and target strategic markets that will be very important to Perth's overall reopening and recovery. An ongoing point made, when we are in our engagement processes as we recommence air routes, is that it is as much about tourism as it is about cargo—looking at the front of the plane, the belly of the plane, and tourism and leisure travel. We are heavily engaged with the aviation sector at the moment. The aviation recovery fund sits there as a key tool to enable us to recommence aviation routes. We are working with Perth Airport extensively and, indeed, Perth Airport facilitates a lot of the conversations we have. As airlines review their fleets and the sorts of aircraft they have available and the routes they would like to take, we will engage with the airlines on that. The fund will be utilised on a case-by-case basis considered by the government to encourage airline providers to recommence services here, in line, obviously, with border openings and any potential travel bubbles we have.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I would like some clarification because often a parliamentary secretary may replace a minister or a minister may not be in the Legislative Assembly, so a parliamentary secretary may take over. Is there scope for any more members of Parliament to perhaps go over to the other side and answer questions on behalf of the minister?

Ms J.J. SHAW: Disappointed you never got a guernsey while you were one?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I did.

The CHAIR: The parliamentary secretary is appearing as adviser on behalf of the minister. If the minister left the chamber, we would not be able to continue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I just wanted clarification; it is highly unusual. I do not think I have seen it in my 16 years. Maybe the minister is slipping and needs help!

Ms L. METTAM: I would like to ask what the Minister for Tourism's involvement is regarding the Busselton Margaret River Airport. The flights were to begin earlier this year, but obviously because of COVID and the borders, it has been put on hold. What is the status of that, and what is the level of tourism involvement and potentially this recovery fund involvement for that project?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Obviously, we are very keen to see the first flight between Melbourne and Busselton, as soon as it is safe for that to happen. I think this is an important project because this could be the next newest popular route with the eastern seaboard. Certainly, I think Sydney will become a real possibility in the future, once the Melbourne flight is up and running. As the member will be well aware, because it is in her electorate, the infrastructure is in place for the airport terminal et cetera. The flight, unfortunately, should have taken place in June this year but due to COVID was unable to take place. Until the situation changes in Melbourne, we will not see a flight.

TWA, as the agency, has of course been involved in discussions over a long period as that proposal was being developed. As Minister for Tourism, I personally see it as a very important addition to our suite of offerings via the aviation entry into the state. As I say, we want to make sure the Melbourne–Busselton route succeeds. My understanding was that uptake of bookings for the inaugural flights was good. Sydney could potentially follow once the Melbourne–Busselton route is established and operating. It will be an excellent thing for the south west. When the statistics show that 93 per cent of visitors to the state come via Perth, this will add another important gateway to the state.

[4.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: That is good to hear, minister, because the Minister for Police called the project a pup.

The minister talked about the Busselton Margaret River Airport terminal, which has not received the full gamut of what it was originally promised for its expansion. The Underwater Observatory interpretive centre will be funded by money that was allocated to the terminal.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is going to be a good project, too.

Ms L. METTAM: It is a fantastic project. I imagine that they will work hand in hand very well.

My question is: can the minister provide an assurance that when these flights begin, if there is an issue with capacity at the terminal—we know regional aviation projects are challenging—the expansion of the terminal will take place as originally proposed?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Let us get the flights going first. We are ready for them. Obviously, the airline is keen for that route to be established and operational. What might need to be modified, changed or adapted in terms of

visitation experience once people land in Busselton are considerations for the future. But I am very keen to see that route operational. I think it will be successful. I think it has huge potential. Again, as I said, I think that it could be a door opener for direct routes to other destinations on the eastern seaboard, including Sydney. I think it is an exciting opportunity. We are very keen for the COVID situation to abate so that we can get that first flight going and build market with regard to that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a question following from the question of the member for Collie–Preston. In terms of the \$25 million to subsidise or reduce the cost of airfares, is the minister aware of airlines that have not paid landing fees to local governments or owners of airports? For example, Qantas owes a significant amount of money to towns that own airports. In the minister’s considerations to giving away \$25 million to try to reduce airfares, and given that a policy adviser talked about renegotiating routes and so forth, will the minister in his negotiations seek to recoup money that is owed to local governments or airport owners? It is a considerable amount of money—a huge amount of money. Will the minister negotiate with those airlines to pay those bills before he gives taxpayers’ money to them?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not aware of any of the examples that the member raises. I would be interested to hear of them, and the member can certainly —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: They have been highlighted in the media. Is the minister not aware of one airline that has not paid an airport or a local government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am answering the question. In terms of commercial negotiations, we are focused on making sure that we are able to stimulate regional economies—in this case as much as possible by increased visitation. Our negotiations with various airlines have been focused on providing affordable opportunities for people to explore the regions. That will continue to be our focus. If there are commercial or contractual obligations between two other parties, it is up to those parties to resolve them. I expect that they will be resolved appropriately. If it is a major carrier, it has a community obligation, and I would expect it to fulfil its contractual obligations with, in this case, a local government authority that happens to be the owner of an airport.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2, the table “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, and the heading “COVID-19 Response”. The budget in 2020–21 for the line item “Regional Aviation Recovery” was \$15 million. The actual was just over \$3 million. The 2021–22 budget estimate is \$6.9 million. Can the minister elaborate on what the regional aviation recovery program is and how it will assist the aviation industry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The industry in the state’s north, in particular, has felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic the most. The remoteness of the north west makes it difficult to attract intrastate tourists. The industry has felt the impact of cancelled interstate bookings when border closures have taken place. The regional aviation recovery program in 2020–21, which constitutes some of the figures that the member highlighted, forms part of the state’s COVID recovery plan. It seeks to provide affordable pricing for tourists and regional residents over the longer term. It also focuses on or seeks to instil competition, where possible—I highlight—on routes to encourage lower fares. We also, of course, discounted or supported discounted fares to Broome through Virgin, and to Exmouth through Qantas over a 12-month period; and to Kununurra through Virgin over a six-month period. That aligned with the region’s peak tourism period. This ensured the operation of five flights a week, in addition to Saturday and Sunday flights, to Kununurra, which were also part of an agreement with Virgin.

The member might also be aware that the agency packaged other incentives along with airline flights to Kununurra when interstate bookings were cancelled because of COVID. The \$300 Kimberley Wanderer Pass allowed someone purchasing a flight to Kununurra to also avail themselves of a tourism experience while they were up there. I understand it was very successful. It was very targeted. That is what we did when there was a particular need to backfill vacancies because of COVID—we tried to fill those vacancies. In the case of the Kimberley Wanderer Pass, it included a discount for an experience.

[4.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of the airlines to which that money has been allocated over the course of the last 12 months?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Again, as the member is probably aware, the negotiation of these arrangements is commercial-in-confidence. Given that circumstance, it is not possible to provide that information. We can provide the member with specific information, perhaps through a question on notice, on what we spent on the Kimberley Wanderer Pass, for example, but commercial-in-confidence negotiations cannot be divulged, as I am sure the member can appreciate.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to advise, without providing a figure, which airlines have received this financial assistance?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have highlighted those.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister repeat the companies that have benefited from the regional aviation recovery package?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is just Virgin and Qantas at this point in time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Since these companies have received financial assistance from the taxpayers of Western Australia, in his renegotiation of these contracts, will the minister ask whether these companies have paid local governments the right amount of money for landing fees or the utilisation of the airport—it could be a private company, such as Broome International Airport—and demand that they pay their bills before taxpayer money is used to assist those companies to fly to these destinations?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Again, these are contractual arrangements between two parties of which I am not a party. However, in conversations with a range of stakeholders, I will raise it as a matter that has been drawn to my attention.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Renewable Hydrogen”. The 2020–21 budgeted amount is \$7.7 million. The 2020–21 estimated actual is \$2 million, the 2020–21 budgeted estimate is \$5.872 million and so on. What is that expenditure for, because it was not mentioned in the description that the minister gave before when he spoke about renewable hydrogen?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In August 2020, the state government announced a boost to funding for hydrogen through the WA recovery plan. This included \$5 million to fund a second round of the renewable hydrogen fund, \$3 million for a legal frameworks review, \$2.7 million to expand the renewable hydrogen unit, \$1 million to identify suitable locations for the geological storage of hydrogen, another \$1 million towards developing a detailed hydrogen value chain model and \$600 000 to study blending hydrogen in the Western Australian gas network. I understand that those amounts relate to those particular items, and the director general has indicated that that is correct.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Tourism Recovery Program”. Why is there no funding for the tourism recovery program in 2021–22?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member may be aware that we recently announced a \$16.8 million WA tourism and travel agent support fund, which is co-funded with the federal government. The announcement was made by the Premier and Senator Michaelia Cash, from memory, in August this year. That money is focused on tourism recovery. My understanding is that it does not appear in the state budget, but, of course, it is a commitment to tourism recovery so there are funds for tourism recovery in that context.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that a co-funded amount of \$16 million for travel agents?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Travel agents are included. It is the WA tourism and travel agent support fund, and, of course, it will appear essentially in the midyear review.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it is new money.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, it is new money, of which half—\$8.4 million—is a contribution from the state.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is no money in the forward estimates to cater for any future impact on tourism and small businesses if we have an outbreak of COVID; cabinet will decide whether money is required. Why has the government not allocated \$8 million in future years to properly plan for a COVID outbreak?

[4.30 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member would be aware, the scope, impact and severity of a COVID outbreak in dollar terms cannot necessarily be predicted. In the case of a lockdown, our approach over the last 18 months has been to assess the impact and respond with an appropriate budget allocation. That is the practice for not just this government, but other governments around the country. They assess the impact that can include the length of time for a lockdown and the regional impact. Some regions are more severely impacted than others depending on the restrictions imposed. My understanding is that the practice of most governments in Australia, including the federal government, is that there is an assessment of the circumstances and then an appropriate response, including a budget commitment response. The \$16.8 million recognises that the impact on tourism in Western Australia was affecting aspects of the sector and that the funding needed to be targeted, which is one of the reasons that the circumstances for travel agents were considered in the recent announcement by the Premier and the federal minister. Looking forward, and depending upon what circumstances and impacts we may face, the government will respond. It has a track record of doing that and it will finesse those responses based upon the experiences. One of the things that we found, even with the \$16.8 million in funding, was the need to look at the criteria more closely in terms of broadening the scope and capacity to accommodate more businesses that perhaps were not captured in earlier support initiatives. I am very confident that if there are further outbreaks, we will respond as we have already over the last 18 months.

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Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have those businesses already accessed the \$16.8 million in funding that the minister said was co-funded by the state and federal governments?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Applications opened earlier this month on 6 September, and I think they close at the end of September. Take up so far has included —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Was this during the last lockdown?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is for the current impacts as a result of the eastern states' lockdowns. Businesses that particularly rely on interstate travel have been impacted by the lockdowns in eastern states. There has been some important nuancing and finessing of the criteria, including the comparison of the business's turnover during two two-month periods. One of the challenges for some businesses in earlier alliterations of support was the criteria that required them to compare their turnover for two months this year with that of two months last year. They were not getting an appropriate comparison. We have finessed that criteria.

As of today, there have been about 242 applications and so far 86 have been approved. All applications are in some stage of assessment and there is a rolling weekly payment program. The aim is to get that money out as soon as is practicable to those people who need that support. We have people working with those businesses to get through the application process so that those applications can be assessed as soon as possible and the support delivered.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question is about authentic Aboriginal tourism. I refer to page 204 of the budget papers, paragraph 7.3. How will \$20 million Aboriginal tourism fund support Aboriginal tourism?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for Thornlie for the question. This is something that very important for Western Australia, particularly as we move forward into a post-COVID world. Western Australia probably has the most diverse Indigenous population and heritage of any of the states and territories. A person can travel the length and breadth of the state and, because of the diversity of our Indigenous heritage and our Indigenous communities, find that all of them have a unique story to tell. I am very proud of the work that was put in to secure a \$20 million commitment to our Aboriginal tourism strategy. It will be delivered, first of all, through the Tjina plan—a \$20 million commitment over four years to deliver on an aspiration for Western Australia to be the premier place for visitors to have an Indigenous experience. It will ensure that, essentially, when people come to Western Australia, or Western Australians travel within the state, and seek to have an authentic Indigenous experience, they actually get a high-quality experience. I applaud the numerous Indigenous tourism providers and product in our state. They vary from on country experiences through to art galleries in the remote areas of the state, whether they be in Wiluna or—where is that one I keep being told to go to with the slumped glass —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Warburton.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, that one in Warburton, or a bush tucker experience in the south west or an experience in the city. I applaud all the existing providers, even those that have been operating for many years on the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome. Many of them are small or single-person enterprises and some of them are larger. We want to support those that exist but also grow new opportunities and the Tjina plan is focused on doing that. There are some streams in the Tjina plan that are focused on developing business capacity and facilitating the development of experiences in a variety of contexts. It is a bold plan. Playing a key role in this plan will be the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council, the agency—Tourism Western Australia—and communities and other tourism businesses in regional WA. They all have a role to play to develop, nurture and encourage this aspiration to become a premier destination. If there is a positive to be taken out of the COVID experience, it is that we now have some time to hone those opportunities to develop, nurture and support them. The member, who is an avid bushwalker and lover of the environment, knows that this government has committed to the Aboriginal ranger program. We see strong linkages to that government program and to the Camping with Custodians program, which is operated with support through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

We are also very strongly supportive of local governments that understand the role that they can play, and should play, in the telling of local Indigenous stories. I think this is a good plan. It is an important plan for the development of our tourism product in Western Australia. It positions us to offer visitors experiences—whether intrastate, interstate or international—so that they do not go home disappointed that they did not have a good, high-quality and authentic experience—that they will go back to the place where they live saying, “I went to Western Australia and I was knocked over by the beauty and the power of the storytelling that came from an authentic Indigenous experience.” We already have a great network out in our communities in the cultural art space. We have several dozen Aboriginal art galleries and cultural centres throughout the state, particularly in the Pilbara in the north west. We want to maximise the benefits for those people who produce the art; tell the stories to not only get a financial benefit but also share the oldest living culture on this planet. It is a great aspiration.

[4.40 pm]

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 21 September 2021]

p123b-138a

Mr Vincent Catania; Mr David Templeman; Chair; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw; Mr Chris Tallentire

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister elaborate on the Aboriginal tourism fund? Paragraph 7.3 on page 204 refers to \$20 million for the Aboriginal tourism action plan 2021–2025. Under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, there is \$320 000 for “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” this financial year, \$1.2 million for 2022–23, and \$2.75 million for each of the 2023–24 and 2024–25 forward estimates. I am not very good at maths, but it does not really add up to \$20 million. Can the minister show me where the \$20 million is in the budget? “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” is on page 215. I am assuming that is what it is.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member is referring to the grants expenditure attached to that fund.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How much is for the Aboriginal tourism fund in 2021–22? Can the minister provide the breakdown over the five years?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is as shown in the budget, and expanding out into 2024. I did maths 4 at Northam Senior High School; I reckon it adds up to about \$20 million!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Whereabouts is that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: At the top of page 202.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the Aboriginal tourism fund? What is that in aid of?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is the Tjina plain. The member was referring to other figures.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am referring to the Aboriginal tourism fund of \$320 000.

The CHAIR: You are on the grants and subsidies.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No. The member is referring to the grants one. “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” is the first item under “Election Commitments”.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that now. In terms of the Aboriginal tourism fund of \$320 000 in 2021–22, what is that in aid of?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Renata to respond because she will be able to give the member that detail.

Ms R. Lowe: As to the grants and subsidies for the Aboriginal tourism fund, when we deliver activities such as the Camping with Custodians program, we grant funds to communities for the delivery of their activity. We do all the work with them in the planning and approvals, but when it comes to actually building the bricks and mortar, we provide the funding to them in a grant.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How many Camping with Custodians have we got now?

Ms R. Lowe: Minister, we have five in operation. One is under construction at Djarindjin on the Dampier Peninsula, one is in the planning stage, and we have just put out, through the minister, a registration of interest from communities on further developments.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to service 7, “Tourism Destination Development”, on page 211 of the budget papers. I note this service area focuses on tourism supply side issues, working across government and industry to determine the needs of destinations. Can the minister please advise what support has been provided to support Kalbarri, which was significantly damaged by cyclone Seroja earlier this year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. Significant damage was experienced not only in Kalbarri but right through the midwest as cyclone Seroja crossed the coast at Kalbarri and continued inland, crossing through several shires in the midwest and ultimately into the wheatbelt. Minister Whitby, the Minister for Emergency Services, was lead minister in terms of the response. However, from a tourism perspective, it was important for the agency and the tourism sector to respond, particularly those providers in Kalbarri and surrounds. I visited the township of Kalbarri in the weeks following the cyclone. I met with business owners and tourism operators. It was a frank and robust meeting. A whole range of issues were highlighted with regard to their immediate needs. They were aspirational objectives by the operators there.

In response, Tourism WA dedicated a recovery program for the region that included a range of initiatives. A number of them were immediate. We placed an officer from Tourism WA in the region to assist tourism operators as they rebuilt. An office to provide support was put directly into the region. The sum of \$250 000 was provided to the Mid West Development Commission to support the redevelopment of public tourism infrastructure in Kalbarri, particularly infrastructure that had been damaged by the cyclone. That funding was used to assist the Shire of Northampton and the Kalbarri Development Association in the redevelopment of beach and foreshore infrastructure. Funding of \$220 000 went to Australia’s Coral Coast regional tourism organisation. That RTO is focused on tourism promotion for the region. That \$220 000 went towards marketing activities to promote a measured return to visitation to Kalbarri and other cyclone-impacted areas. The sum of \$50 000 went to Australia’s Coral Coast to provide 50 per cent discounts on tours and hire equipment in Kalbarri. This was known as Experience Kalbarri at Half Price.

It was launched on 19 August and sold out within a week. It was one of the things that was particularly put to me when I visited, particularly by tourism operators, boat-hire owners and businesses that run four-wheel drive or motorbike experiences on the beach; all of those sorts of experiences. The uptake of their product was very slow; even when people started coming back to Kalbarri, because it was officially, if you like, open again.

That support is very, very important. Again, it demonstrates how we have always tried to respond to needs and target a response, and that particular response was obviously very successful. Nearly 1 000 visitors booked tours or hired equipment through Kalbarri Visitor Centre. Importantly, the program was delivered through the Kalbarri tourism centre, which is important for a small local tourism centre. It is important that it was able to assist directly with the promotion. Twelve operators in the visitor centre received commissions from that targeted program. We will look at those sorts of programs for experiences into the future. That targeted program worked really well, and if such a targeted program is required in the future, that is what we will consider. We have done it in the City of Perth and a range of other places.

Also, in July, we made a \$104.5 million allocation to support recovery and rebuild in areas impacted by the cyclone. That is a federal and state initiative. I understand that is a historic amount. The 16 local government areas affected are eligible for funding from the disaster recovery fund in addition to \$4 000 grants through the small business grants program administered by Minister Whitby's Small Business Development Corporation.

I am very pleased that Kalbarri is now on the road to recovery from what has been a devastating experience. One of the important things highlighted to me by one of the residents is that it was a very frightening experience for many of the residents of that town, particularly children. One of the operators whom I met with—who was quite distressed, to be honest, on the day I was there—talked about not only the devastation caused to infrastructure and houses, which is heartbreaking, but also the impact of the cyclone's ferocity on children who had sheltered with their parents and loved ones during that evening. That is an important consideration when local governments are working to restore a town back to full operation. Thankfully, Western Australians heard the call to go back and support Kalbarri and are doing so in big numbers. I understand that, again, the school holiday period looks as though it will be a very, very popular time to visit that magnificent region of Western Australia.

[4.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: From the outset, yes, the minister is right about children being affected. If he talks to people at the school, he will see the impact it has had on the school community. It has managed to slowly make its way forward, but every time it rains it brings back that memory.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right, or high wind.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is right. In Kalbarri, it is not business as usual. There is still a lot of heartache, and a lot of families living with other families. There is a lot of pressure to find workers to rebuild Kalbarri. As the member for Geraldton will know, there is no accommodation left in Kalbarri. Even in Geraldton, it is very hard to get accommodation because that is where the tradies and builders are coming from. The government made a commitment out of that \$100-and-so million, or a commitment very early on, to provide workers' accommodation to Kalbarri. In actual fact, it was an election commitment announced by, I think, the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development in the dying days of the campaign. They said that they will support and financially assist workers' accommodation for the tourism businesses of Kalbarri. Where is it, minister? Where is the support for those businesses who are doing it tough? Kalbarri is not all beer and skittles. Yes, it is slowly recovering, but I would say that it is about 20 per cent of the way. It will take years. Where is the support for workers' accommodation? Given that many houses have been destroyed or are in the process of being rebuilt, and accommodation is at a premium, how is the government helping the small businesses and the tourism operators by providing workers' accommodation? Where is it at, minister?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have highlighted to the member that no-one can really understand what someone has gone through unless they go through it themselves. I have spoken to people who went through cyclone Tracy as children who are now full-grown adults and the impact is still with them, and I do not underestimate that. I also do not underestimate the impact on children and families in Kalbarri and, indeed, in other parts of that region; farming communities further inland also experienced pretty strong damage to their properties and houses. Through its emergency management processes, the government responded immediately to immediate needs with a variety of service providers to restore power and water connections et cetera. From an emergency management perspective, both salaried and volunteer personnel were required. The response from the Western Australian volunteer community was remarkable. A State Emergency Service brigade from my community in Mandurah went to the region to respond, as did crews from a number of other places. Western Australians more broadly, I think, appreciate in some way the impact, but no-one really understands it unless they go through it. Minister Whitby is the lead minister. His response as a new minister in the government, just weeks after the election, was outstanding. He has been committed to delivering a cross-government response, which included immediate support and then calling upon

the federal government for support. That has resulted in a record state–federal government commitment of over \$104 million for recovery.

I have highlighted to the member in detail the tourism support that came directly from my agency. Again, we listened and focused on what we could do through my agency to support that community. In terms of infrastructure, the record \$104.5 million has a variety of streams of support that will be ongoing. I think the member is right. The reality is the recovery will take years. There is no doubt about that. I can assure the member that the people of that town have been very much in the thoughts and actions of local, state and federal governments, and will continue to be. From a tourism perspective, I will do everything I can to ensure that Kalbarri is marketed as a fantastic destination so that visitation can continue in the future and support the businesses that rely on a steady stream of visitation to the region. We will look at a whole range of supporting infrastructure, including the magnificent Skywalk, which I think is a wonderful addition to that region, and at how we can interpret our natural environs so that the visitation experience is even more enhanced. All those will assist the local community.

I am sure that those conversations on workers' accommodation and housing and the \$104.5 million can be had with Minister Whitby. It is one of a number of considerations that need to be addressed and are being addressed, including the power problem. As I said, the legacy issue has been around for a long time and it is being fixed. My understanding is that an electrical unit—I am not sure what the correct term for it is—will be installed.

[5.00 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is going to assist; it will not fix it, minister.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not want to get political, but I have to say that the member has been a member for that place for a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member has been a member for that area for a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, I have not—it has been for about six months.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, but part of a government prior to that that did not address a lot of infrastructure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister does not know the history of it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, no, no—you do not like it when it is thrown back at you, do you?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Do not embarrass yourself!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: You do not like it, do you?

The CHAIR: Are we moving on to the next question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We will move on to the next question because he is rambling.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am going to continue to keep Kalbarri at the forefront of our considerations for tourism and visitation support. That is why we are investing in supporting some infrastructure for the local government. That is why we are supporting programs for targeting and assisting tourism operators—those I have highlighted—and we will keep looking at that as a means of supporting tourism into the future, because I think people will continue to see Kalbarri as a place they want to visit into the future. The future looks bright for them in that respect as we work together to address the challenges that cyclone Seroja delivered on that April night earlier this year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” and to “Tourism—Other Grants and Sponsorships”. Reference is made to \$800 000 each year until 2024–25. The minister spoke about Kalbarri and the midwest being affected by the cyclone and referred to the so-called grants that have filtered out to those in Kalbarri. When it comes to tourism businesses, a grant of \$4 000 was made available out of the recovery for tourism businesses and businesses in general.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Small businesses.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes. Kalbarri is made up of a lot of mum-and-dad businesses, for want of a better word, who do not earn more than \$75 000 a year. Unfortunately, those grants missed a lot of those businesses and tourism operators because they could not meet that criteria of earning more than \$75 000, plus being registered for GST and so forth. The criteria announced by the Minister for Small Business clearly did not meet a lot of the needs of the majority of small businesses in Kalbarri. What is the government doing to address that situation to allow those mums and dads or sole traders to access the \$4 000 that was to assist those businesses in Kalbarri?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The question is, essentially, in relation to that program and I do not have a budget item for that in my budget area; however, I am happy to answer it in the context of the recent announcement on the support for tourism businesses and travel agents. The reality is that we learn from each program. The learnings quite often relate to how we tweak the criteria for the next program—whether it is a subsidy, a grant or a discount. The aim is

not to discard people from being considered; it is to make sure we target it to those who need it. The criteria in the fund that is referenced in this budget does that, because we learnt from earlier iterations, if you like. That includes the months that are used to compare income loss and eligibility. The definitions issue is one also that has been raised and has been tweaked in subsequent programs. One of the challenges is that some businesses have registered in previous iterations. Some wineries, for example, register as a winery, but also have a cafe registration as well. There are various examples of some applications that were excluded because they were not a particular defined business. In this recent round we have worked very hard to look at the criteria and the two-monthly comparisons that assess them against loss and also at expanding the net, if you like, of capturing businesses that under other iterations would not have been captured prior.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How is that impacting on the businesses that have missed out on that \$4 000?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That program has concluded. It was opened and closed; it has concluded. Subsequent programs have been delivered. The \$4 000 grant the member mentioned did not have a continuous time line. It was not a rolling program. It was a program that had a defined time. That was not a program auspiced by myself or by my agency but in the development of the latest support package through tourism; it was specific to tourism businesses. The criteria were to capture as many tourism businesses as possible. We did some other things at the request, by the way, of tourism operators in Kalbarri and its surrounds; for example, with regard to requests for the waiving of fees and licences specific to those who might be licensed to operate on Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions land. The requests to waive those fees were successful. We waived fees for them, because that is what a lot of the business entities said would really help them. They said that if they could have their fees waived that they pay to the DBCA for accessing the national park, for example, that would be really helpful. The government listened, the agency listened, and the minister listened and it was delivered. In these programs we listen constantly about the impact and measure it carefully, and if we have to tweak or modify, we will, and we have.

[5.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That does not help those people, those businesses and those mums and dads who suffered because of the cyclone. They were not able to access that \$4 000 because they were a sole trader, did not pay GST and earned under \$75 000. Does that not highlight that the minister's agency, Tourism WA, was not on the ground talking to businesses during the early part of the cyclone disaster and the need to bring tourism agency staff back into the regions so there was a direct link between what was happening on the ground and what the minister was being told?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not agree with the premise of the member's question. The government and a whole range of other agencies responded —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about a tourism response that could have influenced some of these changes to the \$4 000.

The CHAIR: Member, let the minister answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The \$4 000 program that the member is referring to was not an initiative of the tourism budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It affected tourism businesses. You did nothing about it.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, let the minister answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Get off your high horse. We have been going pretty well so far. The program that the member referred to, auspiced through the Minister for Small Business, was an immediate response to immediate need. From an agency perspective, through my visit and also through the positioning of an officer in the region to support tourism businesses to recover —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Where was that person put?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In Geraldton. The member just told me there was no room in Kalbarri for them.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How often? That should be taken into consideration.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, let the minister answer please.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would not let an officer take up a place that should be taken up by a local resident. The member's argument is that there is not enough housing and now he asks why we did not house an officer in the town itself. The fact is that the officer worked and continues to work very closely with the tourism office, and it was appreciated. The member may not appreciate that support. I do, and so do the businesses that have benefited from it. That has happened. In addition, as I highlighted in an earlier question, after discussing what was needed by the tourism businesses in that town to respond, it included things like helping them waive fees and licences so they do not have to pay the fees and licences they need to pay. That was done. That was delivered by the government.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 21 September 2021]

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Mr Vincent Catania; Mr David Templeman; Chair; Ms Lara Dalton; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Ms Jodie Hanns; Ms Jessica Shaw; Mr Chris Tallentire

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, that was a piddly amount but a welcome amount.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member asked me a question about supporting tourism businesses in the town and I am going to tell him what we did. The member is trying to say that we did not do anything.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am trying to give feedback on what is happening on the ground.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will tell the member what we did. If he is not going to listen to me, that is his choice. We provided targeted marketing, we supported the regional tourism organisation, the development commission and local government. All the projects targeted what was required and inputted —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Not what was needed. What was needed was workers' accommodation.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sorry, member. When I was up there, the boat tourism operators said it would be really helpful to have a program that allowed visitors to access a discounted program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And they are right but they need more.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was delivered. What happened? In one week, it sold out. I think that responds to need. This government, through its commitment and collaboration with the federal government, responded with a record amount of money for the recovery. That money has a variety of streams that will be delivered to the people in the region. The sad thing is that people like the member go around stirring up people who are already hurting and suffering in a way that I do not think is helpful to their capacity to rebuild.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How so? Explain that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We all know your history. We all know your personality. We all know your business.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The history! I was there helping out. Where were you?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We all know what sort of person you are.

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for North West Central. I am on my feet. Let us move on. I give the call to the member for Collie–Preston.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Can the minister outline initiatives that the government has implemented to support the tourism sector recover from the effects of COVID-19? I refer in particular to paragraph 7 on page 204. I acknowledge that we have already covered subparagraphs 7.1 and 7.3. I am interested in subparagraph 7.2.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are a range of initiatives. I am not sure whether the committee wants to move on. We have officers from the Heritage Council of Western Australia and the National Trust of Australia (WA). If members do not want them to be here, do they want to let them go?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister can keep answering that question and we will give him an answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: A range of initiatives focused on supporting the recovery of the tourism sector. I have mentioned a couple but I want to highlight some that I think are important. The intrastate marketing campaign, Wander Out Yonder, which was launched last year, was highly successful. The encouragement of local people to explore WA has been remarkable. I think that campaign was outstanding. People come up to me all the time and say that they have been to places in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia, that they had never been to before or they had not been to for decades. Of course, we are going to see that now with the wildflower experience in the midwest and the wheatbelt areas of regional Western Australia. Record numbers of people are going through those areas. That is doing great things for businesses such as the bakery in Mingenew and the butcher in Perenjori. Those tourism campaigns are making a big difference to those communities. The great thing is that those communities are getting a chance to showcase themselves. People in the town in which I taught, Three Springs, cannot remember the last time they saw the number of visitors they are seeing now exploring the midwest and the wildflower environs.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It went downhill after you left, minister!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I know that the school went down in terms of numbers.

The campaigns have been very successful. I mentioned the Kimberley Wanderer Pass earlier. That focused on assisting tours and experiences in the East Kimberley. There are essentially three subregions in the Kimberley. They are different in terms of impact. The eastern part of the Kimberley, which includes Kununurra and its surrounds, is much starker than Broome, for example, because the East Kimberley relies very much on interstate visitation. It was impacted when borders were closed as a result of COVID-19.

We had the Perth Staycation campaign. We need not forget the importance of Destination Perth. A number of our hotels had some occupancy on weekends but mid-week was very difficult for them in terms of volume. The

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Perth Staycation campaign targeted city accommodation. It is great to hear that in the lead-up to the grand final on Saturday, a lot of our CBD hotels are booked out, which is fantastic. We want that mid-week visitation to increase. Activities and events that are associated with Perth are important to that story. Take a Mate to WA was a campaign initiative that offered special return airfares from Perth to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The Relook and Book campaign focused on backfilling the cancellations that occurred in regional Western Australia, in particular, encouraging people to relook at the availability of accommodation because of the cancellations from interstate visitors. Those vacancies could then be filled.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I still could not get in.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is a case in point.

We hosted the Bledisloe Cup and we will host the AFL grand final on Saturday. We have secured game II of the State of Origin and the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships in early 2022. We will keep looking at all types of events, both sporting and cultural, to feature in Perth to continue to build on that visitation. We will keep nuancing these campaigns and marketing to the aspirations of visitors to Western Australia, be they within the state, interstate or international, when it is safe for that travel to take place.

The appropriation was recommended.

[5.20 pm]