

MARGARET RIVER GOURMET ESCAPE

Statement by Minister for Tourism

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.04 am]: Over the past six years, the Margaret River Gourmet Escape has been successful in establishing the region's reputation as a gourmet food and wine destination. However, I also note that the state has spent a considerable amount of money in achieving this outcome. The priority of this government is to ensure that we do everything possible to drive visitation. We no longer enjoy the luxury of the mining boom era when hotel rooms were full with business travellers and Western Australia was sometimes regarded as difficult and expensive to reach for the ordinary traveller. We are now confronted with very different circumstances, hence our current efforts to try to secure direct flights from key overseas destinations that will fill the significant number of high-end, high-quality hotel rooms we now have available.

Our government's strategy must be to use all of our efforts in events and marketing to drive tourism visitation to our state.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Scarborough, it is a ministerial statement.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We want a clearly defined strategy for food and wine festivals that recognises Western Australia is now high quality and very affordable as a destination. We also need a strategy that enhances our trade and agricultural export outcomes. We want to ensure that the high-quality local food and wine at these events is readily available to be served on tables in China, Singapore, Japan and other key markets.

The time is right to explore further opportunities to create the best model for the future. Therefore, I am very pleased that the Margaret River Gourmet Escape will return to the south west in 2018 to ensure that we do not lose the benefits already gained through the festival. I have requested that Tourism WA consult with the food and wine industry, local producers, tourism operators and the community to help determine the specifications for a new international food and wine festival in 2019, across both the Margaret River and Swan Valley wine regions. Tourism WA will then seek proposals from organisations able to coordinate the event, and the successful proponent will be announced in the first half of next year. I look forward to seeing the creation of a new event in the Swan Valley and Margaret River that we can grow and extend across Western Australia in the future.