

AIRFARES — REGIONS

**175. Mr K.J.J. MICHEL to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's initiatives to make regional Western Australia an even more vibrant place to live.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how the McGowan government is boosting regional aviation services, including the delivery of its election commitment to cap regional airfares?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of any alternatives to these successful initiatives?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

I thank the member for Pilbara for that question.

- (1)–(2) The issue of very high airfares for regional residents has been an issue that has plagued regional Western Australia for many, many years. That is why we are very proud of our initiative that we took to the last election to cap the price of airfares for regional Western Australians so that regional residents have, in a sense, a two-zone fare—either \$199 or \$299, depending on where they live. It is important to note just how successful this program has been. Between October and December, more than 37 800 capped airfares were flown. That was a 33 per cent increase from the quarter before it. We started this program on 1 July last year. In the first quarter, there were 28 000 airfares, and over 37 000 airfares in the next quarter.

Members can see how successful this program is throughout regional WA. Karratha–Perth has been the most successful route, with 8 500 one-way capped airfares flown between October and December. The third most popular route is Port Hedland–Perth. For the member for Kalgoorlie and her constituents—we know exactly how big an issue it was in Kalgoorlie—there was a 62 per cent increase in usage of this capped airfare in just one quarter. As members can tell, it is very successful. No other jurisdiction in Australia is implementing a scheme like this.

The question was: was there an alternative to this program; in particular, was there such an alternative or any type of program implemented under the previous government? The answer of course is no. Although it talked about it, it did nothing to put pressure down on regional airfares in this state. It did nothing. It had royalties for regions and it did not tackle probably one of the most basic issues out there, in particular in the regions through the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the midwest and goldfields, and that was airfares. Maybe one of the reasons the former government did not tackle that is that it is now the “MetroNats”. It is now the party that is chasing the vote of the densely populated areas. Of course, where Nationals members choose to live means probably the only initiative they will be using will not be capped airfares, but Metronet itself.