

AIRLINE SERVICES, REGIONAL AREAS

407. Mr SWEETMAN to the Premier:

I refer to the announcement today that the New South Wales Government under Premier Bob Carr has provided modest financial support of \$3 million to ensure that Hazelton Air is able to resume flights to some regional areas of that State.

- (1) Will the Premier now accept the Liberal Party's offer of bipartisan support for a \$3 million facility to get Skywest Airlines flying as soon as possible?
- (2) Will the Premier admit that his announcement today of more money for tourism advertising and promotion falls short of what is required to assist families and businesses that are struggling right now in regional areas of Western Australia?

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(2) It is very important that all members of this House understand the different situation that exists in New South Wales. Yesterday, the other side of the House applauded the Bracks and Beattie Governments for their contribution to tourism. This Government has made a decision that means that those commitments pale into insignificance. Where are the plaudits from the Opposition?

Let us address the real issue. There are two differences: in New South Wales there were no air services to the two destinations now being serviced. That is a significant difference from the situation in Western Australia in which, as a result of the efforts of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure last week, Qantas was back in the air by 12 noon after the collapse of Ansett at 3.00 am. That is not a bad effort and I congratulate the minister for the work she did. The second difference is that developments involving the future of Skywest have been occurring in Western Australia by the minute. The Government has made it clear that it wants Skywest sold as a separate entity. Negotiations continue between the administrator, potential purchasers and Qantas about leasing arrangements. The New South Wales agreement deals only with two high-volume routes. It does not deal with all the services in New South Wales. Is the member aware of that?

Mr Sweetman: It is a similar scenario.

Dr GALLOP: It is not a similar scenario. There were no services in New South Wales. The situation in this State is very difficult. We must proceed on the basis of commonsense and rationality step by step, so that long-term sustainable solutions can be found. The notion that the Government should jump in quickly, as advocated by the Opposition, is not responsible when all sorts of events such as wet-leasing arrangements and the potential purchase of Skywest are occurring.