

MARGARET RIVER WINE FESTIVAL

Statement

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West) [9.36 pm]: I wish to make a brief statement about the recent Margaret River Wine Festival, which was held from Thursday, 17 November to Sunday, 20 November. It was my pleasure to represent the Minister for Tourism at the festival's "Fusion" event on the Saturday, and in particular to welcome locals and tourists to the festival's hub event at Cowaramup. The Margaret River Wine Festival has come a long way since 1991, when I believe the first festival was held in the car park of a local tavern. Such is the magnitude of the change that I am sure no-one could imagine in their wildest dreams that that was ever the case, but it certainly was. This year's fifteenth festival program contained some 60 events, ranging from winemaker-matched dining feasts to art exhibitions, cooking classes and touring musicians. I am reliably informed that the renowned Richard Clapton appeared. There was also some whale spotting. I do not imagine there was much whale spotting at Cowaramup, but nonetheless I am told it did occur during the weekend.

Hon Jon Ford: One never knows what one could spot after a couple of bottles of wine!

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: Yes - one could very well spot a whale!

There were also the obligatory wine tastings and vineyard tours.

There will not be many Western Australians who are not familiar with the Margaret River wine region's phenomenal growth since the first plantings back in the 1960s. The enormous expansion in plantings has in turn been matched by significant improvements in wine quality, so much so that the Margaret River wine region is now recognised as one of the world's super premium winegrowing areas. I add that it obviously utilises the finest and most up-to-date technologies that can be found anywhere in the world.

The Margaret River Wine Festival is a celebration of the uniqueness of the wines and the natural beauty of the Margaret River wine region. The benefits of such iconic regional events are significant in both the short and longer terms. I am reliably informed that the Margaret River economy is expected to benefit directly this year to the tune of some \$1.6 million over the four days of the festival, with an estimated 4 000 people having participated in the many activities that were on offer. The festival also has long-term positive externalities, which include things such as increased investment, new industries, the provision of better physical and social infrastructure, including tertiary education facilities, and increased employment for the region's youth. Over the past 40 years or so Margaret River has grown from an economically impoverished, yet naturally beautiful, region to a thriving tourist, surfing, horticultural and viticultural region, while retaining many of the original farming functions.

Of course, these events do not simply happen. Much time, money and effort goes into such successful events. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the organising committee and the many sponsors involved. In particular I mention the direction provided by and the hard work of the festival director, Petti McInnes; she has done a wonderful job in bringing everything together. EventsCorp, through the regional events scheme, also warrants mention, given that it has funded the Margaret River Wine Festival for the past seven years to the tune of something like \$90 000. Regional Western Australia will continue to benefit from this government's involvement in such events, and I thank the Minister for Tourism for the opportunity to represent the government and welcome guests to the festival's "Fusion" event. I certainly look forward to more of the same in future years.