

ASIAN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

838. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Asian Engagement:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's unprecedented commitment to diversify the WA economy by delivering the state's first Asian engagement strategy. Can the minister update the house on how this government is supporting small and medium businesses in regional WA to access more of the Asian market and, by doing so, create more jobs?

Mr P.C. TINLEY replied:

I thank the member for the question. As members would be aware, last month I formally launched the McGowan government's "Western Australia's Asian Engagement Strategy 2019–2030" as an ambition for the state to take the opportunity that the Asian century and the time zone present to us and our businesses to diversify the economy. Of course, the Asian engagement strategy sits inside Diversify WA, which is the economic framework for the state that seeks to deepen and widen the economy outside the traditional sectors that we have grown the state on and to create the numbers of jobs that are going to be needed in the future. Many members will be aware that Western Australia is home to some of the largest ASX-listed companies, but there are nearly 250 000 small businesses in Western Australia employing nearly half a million Western Australians. This is a significant sector that the McGowan government takes very seriously across all of our portfolios, particularly in relation to jobs. This government does not just simply claim to be a friend of small business; it actually has practical, demonstrable outcomes and objectives, and backs them up. Opening on the Monday just gone were the Access Asia grants, which provide up to \$10 000 to businesses and business councils to undertake investigation and/or marketing activities in the Asian markets. It is a clear statement that we support small to medium businesses as they go about the important work that will diversify the economy. They are the engine rooms of innovation around this state, and we very much appreciate the work they do. Eligible businesses can use the Access Asia grants to participate in a recognised trade event, undertake a visit mission, or cover marketing expenses for marketing opportunities they see in those markets. The most important missing piece for small businesses in Western Australia is the capacity to undertake in-market research to identify where they have a competitive advantage and where they can take their business in the future.

I was pleased to be in the Kimberley just recently to launch the Asian engagement strategy in the regional context. It is no mistake that I went to the Kimberley, because it is probably one of the most internationally focused regions, very much looking to the north and not to the south or the east to undertake its own future. The Kimberley is critical to the McGowan government's diversification to deepen the economy, and it has very good representation across various sectors, including the Ord River scheme, tourism and Indigenous tourism, resources, aquaculture and so much more. The other point I make is that they have not been idle in the Kimberley. Shires there have been very active. Kununurra is about to start direct flights to Melbourne, and there will be flights from Singapore to Broome. The state government has been particularly supportive of this. The Asian engagement strategy has been well received up there. The abiding sentiment that I got from people during my travels in both East Kimberley and West Kimberley is that they are very relieved that there is a government that actually understands the regions and supports small business. We on this side of the house are truly living up to the reputation that we are genuinely the party of the regions and that we are genuinely looking for opportunities to grow the businesses of the regions, unlike those opposite, who previously did nothing to support local businesses in the regions, nor did they do anything to support business here. The Liberal Party in Western Australia was very good at putting its foot on the hose of business growth, with three land tax increases. It put its foot on the hose of the training conduit for our businesses' needs with a 500 per cent increase in TAFE fees. It is the party that is anti-business. It is simply a shell of what it purports to be, and the only way the Nationals WA ever grow their seats is by poaching from this side of the house!

The SPEAKER: I was hoping to get extra questions in today, but that knocked that on the head!