

MALAYSIA AIRLINES FLIGHT MH370 — SEARCH AND RECOVERY

218. MR N.W. MORTON to the Premier:

Before I ask my question, on behalf of the member for Balcatta I welcome and acknowledge the students, teachers and principals from two schools in the Balcatta electorate—namely, Balcatta Senior High School and Servite College—who are in the public gallery this afternoon.

Can the Premier please advise the house on the arrangements in place for the search and recovery of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, and specifically what role the Western Australian government will play?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for the question. I seek the indulgence of the house to read the response because of the sensitivity of the issues and the need for accuracy.

As everyone is aware, Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing went missing on 8 March. The 239 passengers and crew were from 15 countries, including 152 from China; 50 from Malaysia; seven from Indonesia; and six from Australia. Those people have presumably lost their lives. This is a tragic incident and on behalf of the Western Australian government, the Parliament and the people of this state I offer our support, thoughts and sympathy to the friends and family of those on flight MH370.

Today marks day 27 of the international search and recovery operation, which is now focused around an area approximately 1 800 kilometres west of Perth. Under international conventions Malaysia is responsible for the investigation of flight MH370, and Australia will provide all necessary assistance in the search for and retrieval of the aircraft. Search operations are being undertaken by aircraft and vessels provided by a number of countries, including Australia, Malaysia, Korea, New Zealand, China, the USA and the United Kingdom.

Over the weekend the Prime Minister announced the formation of a Joint Agency Coordination Centre to be led by retired Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston. This centre is an Australian government initiative and anyone seeking information can make use of a hotline—1800 621 372.

It is understood that at the appropriate time the Australian government will make arrangements for the next of kin of people on MH370 to travel to Perth, and while here the Australian and Western Australian governments will work closely with each other to ensure appropriate supports are provided. This is a significant logistical exercise that has already involved, and will continue to involve, considerable planning and preparation at an international, federal and state level.

As for the support provided by the Western Australian government, I can confirm the following: led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, officers from several state and federal government departments have been working closely since mid-last week with representatives from Malaysia Airlines, consular officials, and others such as the Australian Hotels Association to identify a range of issues associated with the recovery of MH370 and the events that will flow from this. Office accommodation and logistical support have been provided to the Australian government to establish its Joint Agency Coordination Centre, with operations commencing on Monday, 31 March. Preliminary work is being undertaken on security arrangements, accommodation requirements, potential memorial services, an induction pack for next of kin who may come to Perth and appropriate means by which members of the public can register their condolences. Much of the work being undertaken by the Western Australian government is being done in close cooperation with the Australian government and not all aspects can be fully explained for security reasons.

I note the significant show of support by businesses, organisations and the Western Australian community who have come forward with suggestions and offers of assistance in a range of areas. All these suggestions are being carefully considered and have been taken into account.

The state government will work closely with the Australian government, which is leading the response from our perspective; consular officials; Malaysia Airlines and others to ensure that our response is appropriate. The people of Western Australia are sensitive to the cultural differences. I thank them for their support and I support all those people at federal and state levels who are working together along with various countries around the world. The state government will do all that it can to assist the efforts to recover the aircraft. Our role is supportive, obviously, of the Australian government. We will do all we can to provide a welcome at a sad time for those who will come to Perth. We will also assist with any memorial services that will be conducted.

I thank members for their bipartisan support of the action being taken.