

CORONAVIRUS — ECONOMIC RECOVERY PACKAGE

734. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Small Business:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's \$5.5 billion recovery plan that includes significant support for those small businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Can the minister outline to the house how this government's COVID-19 industry support fund will help Western Australian travel agents deal with the economic impacts of the pandemic; and, can the minister advise the house how this dedicated support program for travel agents compares with other jurisdictions?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I thank the member for her question and for her advocacy on behalf of all travel agents around the state, particularly Christine Ross-Davies in her own electorate. At the outset, I just have to reflect on the fact that Western Australia is the best place in the nation, if not the world, to have a small business right now. We have an open economy. There is opportunity for small business right across the state. The challenges we have heard—which is a terrible problem, but not a bad problem to have—is the demand for workers in many different sectors; not just agriculture and horticulture, but also hospitality, accommodation and other service-related industries right across the state, because demand is so high, unlike everywhere else. Western Australia leads the nation with regard to its recovery. However, there are some sectors—some pockets—that are doing it tough. Travel agents are clearly one of those. They were severely impacted by the federal government's closure of the international borders. The moment the federal government closed the international borders, travel agents in Western Australia lost 90 per cent of their revenue stream, because 90 per cent of the revenue generated by travel agents prior to COVID was generated by Western Australians leaving the state and travelling overseas. That is no longer available, thanks to the federal government's decision to close the borders.

We responded immediately with measures, particularly for travel agents in bricks-and-mortar outlets, to assist them with their commercial tenancies, amongst many other small business responses that were provided to travel agents and everyone else in the state, but we advocated and have been advocating with the federal government for a targeted response to travel agents and the particular circumstances they confront. Ever since Christine and Jo Francis came to see me and the member for Bicton we ultimately took it to the Premier, and we have also been advocating for them at the federal level—with no success to date, sadly. However, I can report that an element of the COVID industry support fund that we have created as part of our recovery package—the \$5.5 billion McGowan government recovery plan—was launched on 18 September, when we created a dedicated travel agent fund. That fund consists of a \$3 million support package for which eligible home-based travel agents and shopfront bricks-and-mortar outlets can apply. Home-based travel agents can access up to \$5 000 individually, while those operating shopfronts can receive a minimum of \$10 000, and it may be more, subject to how many apply and how many are eligible. We do not really have much visibility of the exact numbers that we are talking about. That work is being done by the Small Business Development Corporation right now. Small businesses are able to access information about the fund via the corporation's website, www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au.

What I can say is that with our dedicated support fund and solid response to our travel agents in Western Australia, with reference to the rest of the nation, we are the only state or jurisdiction in the nation with a dedicated fund for travel agents. I would again call on the federal government to step up into the space. A long-term solution needs to be provided. We as a state are doing what we can, but this is a federal government matter. This is a national issue, it is an ongoing issue, and the federal government needs to step into the space and take responsibility for helping these people in the longer term.