

WORKER ACCOMMODATION — REGIONS

**965. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Tourism:**

I refer to the dire shortage of worker accommodation across towns in regional WA, which mainly rely on tourism as their economic driver. Given the minister publicly confirmed in *The Albany Advertiser* last Tuesday that there is a shortage of worker accommodation in every regional centre that he has visited, what has the minister and his government done to urgently address this issue?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I thank the member for her confirmation that the “Wander out Yonder” campaign has worked far more than anyone could possibly have hoped for. That is the most successful regional tourism campaign in the history of this state. When small businesses across Australia, outside of our state, are struggling under the burden of lack of demand and lack of confidence in the community, and when those businesses are wondering what they are going to do when JobKeeper ends and a cliff approaches, the businesses in Western Australia are confronted with the challenge of having to get more workers to meet the demand. That is a challenge that I would prefer to have. I have travelled the regions since we lifted the restrictions. I have been right across this state, conducting roundtables with tourism businesses in every single region of the state, and including in the member’s seat. I met with people in York and Northam, who told me their numbers were undreamed of. It is inconceivable that they would be confronting the challenge of how to meet the demand and how to accommodate it. That is a challenge. Part of it is directly attributable to the fact that, rightly—it is an instruction that I applaud and agree with—the Prime Minister told working holiday-makers to go home at the start of the pandemic. He told them to go home and many did. That is what has caused a significant challenge with respect to workers in the regions. Working holiday-makers, colloquially termed backpackers, are a big part of our tourism sector, but they are also a big part of the workforce for the tourism sector and the regional workforce. They often do hospitality work and jobs like cleaning in hotels and other accommodation, they work behind bars and as baristas—they do all those sorts of jobs. They frequently do it at the peak of the season. They save up, live on the smell of an oily rag and then splurge in the market, so that is all a good part of the sector. But the truth is that tens of thousands of those people were sent home and they went. That is a workforce that we no longer have. Beyond that, there are demands in every sector, in not only accommodation or hospitality but also resources and manufacturing. I know that in the defence issues portfolio, we have done such a good job of supporting the industry in Western Australia that there is lots of opportunity in that sector. Every sector is seeking skilled labourers and unskilled labourers so that they can train people. It is a competitive market.

**Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup:** Sit him down!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am sorry for answering the question, Mr Speaker. Apparently, the opposition does not want me to answer its question. It would prefer that I ignore the question the member has asked. But the truth is we have launched the Work and Wander Out Yonder campaign.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That has been very successful, has had thousands of responses and has demonstrated interest to attract people from the metropolitan area. But, ultimately, in Western Australia, we confront the challenge of getting more workers for more jobs —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, there is only one person I want to hear.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** — because there is lots of opportunity in WA. I would rather have that problem than the one people are confronting in South Australia right now.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Tell us all again!