

NEW CONCEPT FOR STATE TOURISM STRATEGY

Grievance

MR A.J. DEAN (Bunbury) [9.19 am]: My grievance is directed to the Minister for Tourism and relates to the new concept for state tourism strategy, which involves a reduction in Western Australia's tourism zones from 10 to five. I will come at this grievance from a personal basis, having been involved with the tourism industry for the past 10 years both as a member of the Bunbury Tourism Board for five years, which managed to make Bunbury the top tourism town in 1997 and 1998, and through a ministerial appointment by the former Minister for Tourism, Hon Norman Moore, to the Partnership 21 committee. Unfortunately, I was not able to influence the outcomes of that committee, and part of this grievance relates directly to some of those recommendations.

Anyone who has visited the Bunbury region recently no doubt has been struck by the many exciting developments that are occurring in this dynamic and fast-growing part of the State. Tourism is a vitally important economic driver for the region, providing jobs for our young people and a boost to service industries, and creating opportunities and wealth for small business. Indeed, tourism projects worth \$74 million are currently under way in the south west and great southern regions, with a further \$245 million in the planning stages. Despite terrorism and severe acute respiratory syndrome, tourism has proved it can handle the tough times. The latest figures show that domestic tourism generated more than \$500 million in the south west and great southern regions during 2002. New data from the Western Australian Tourism Commission research review on domestic visitor activity for each region found that 1.587 million intrastate and interstate visitors stayed overnight in the south west during 2002. In terms of tourism, the south west is really getting it right, and perhaps that is why some disquiet has been expressed at the new concept for state tourism and the move to combine the south west and the great southern regions to create the south west, or green, zone. I note the other zones are a Perth and short-trips zone, incorporating Peel and the Avon Valley; a north west zone, incorporating the Kimberley and Pilbara; a central south east zone, incorporating parts of the heartlands, non-coastal mid west, the goldfields, upper Gascoyne and Esperance; and a coastal zone, incorporating parts of the Gascoyne, the mid west and the heartlands, stretching from just north of Lancelin up to Exmouth.

I am concerned today, however, with the make-up of the green zone, which affects my electorate. According to Tourism South West in an open letter to the minister, the media and parliamentarians, the south west currently has the highest number of visitor nights of any other region as a single destination outside Perth. The south west has more tourism product than any other region and more tourism development projects under way outside the Perth metropolitan area. It has the highest regional visitation rates, with 1.5 million overnight domestic visitors spending \$403 million, and 1.6 million domestic day trips to the south west worth \$109 million. The south west currently has the highest number of operators in any region, including Perth. If the great southern region is added to that, the green zone will have more than 37 per cent of the State's accommodation and operators. I note, too, the remarkable success of the south west in marketing the region. According to Tourism South West, the region produces a comprehensive footage and photo library, which is available to international trade and media; supports the Western Australian Tourism Commission and the Perth Convention Bureau's familiarisation program; attends international trade shows; and operates intrastate campaigns. The south west has been extraordinarily successful at marketing itself as one of the State's premier tourism destinations. It is hardly surprising, then, that it has approached the zone restructure with caution. I note the public comments of people like Kerry Clarke, the President of Tourism South West, in expressing concern about the management of the new zone, the make-up of the steering committee that will oversee the development of the regional tourism organisations, and the funding ratios.

On behalf of my constituents I seek from the minister today a reassurance that the new concept for state tourism strategy will deliver the benefits promised and will further the development of the tourism industry in the south west. I say that with a genuine and long-standing interest in the tourism industry in the south west.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Tourism) [9.23 am]: I thank the member for Bunbury for the points he has made in his grievance. I also thank him for his continued and enthusiastic involvement in the tourism industry in the Bunbury area and in the south west.

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: You are like a cracked record with that statement. You never say that about our side.

The SPEAKER: Member for Murray-Wellington, I am sure the minister would do that.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Once again I thank the member for Bunbury for his interest. Indeed, if the member for Murray-Wellington was as enthusiastic as the member for Bunbury, there is no doubt there would be as many developments in his electorate. I thank the member for Murray-Wellington for his involvement with the Pinjarra heritage project. Indeed, he has been a firm supporter of that project, and I am glad that we can give further support to it.

Any change creates anxiety. Although many of the existing zones have been comfortable with the new zone concept, others have not. I assure the member for Bunbury that just last week I was in the region and spent a number of days in the Margaret River and Bunbury areas and was absolutely amazed at the level of development that is taking place there. It is one of the best kept secrets in the State at the moment. The value of tourism development in the south west is absolutely enormous. There is no doubt that it is putting us on the map, not in the quantity of tourism but in the quality of tourism. A comment I made the other evening in Margaret River, which I think will be reiterated around the State, is that people who are wine drinkers go to the Barossa Valley or the Hunter Valley, but people who are wine lovers go to Margaret River.

The south west region has been very successful at marketing itself to tourists, both internationally and nationally as well as within the State; there is no doubt about that. However, the time has come for change. In fact, just this morning I spoke at length with Minister Hockey, the federal minister. As I speak now, the Prime Minister is releasing the white paper on tourism. I was advised by Minister Hockey that the white paper will be the largest package ever put forward for tourism in Australia. I understand that it will move away from the normal iconic marketing of tourism in terms of the bridge, the rock and the reef, as it is called in the tourism industry, and will move much more towards creating a super body and making sure that the regions of Australia are marketed as much as the big cities have been marketed up until now.

This will be very good for Western Australia in particular. It will open up a whole new range of areas within Australia, and the south west will figure very prominently. I note that in this morning's *The West Australian*, Minister Hockey is reported as referring to Margaret River as one of the areas that will benefit most from this program. The devil is always in the detail when dealing with the federal Government, particularly the current federal Government. I am advised that there will be some \$200 million over the next four years in new money for the tourism industry. It is quite clear that the Prime Minister is becoming as aware as we are of the importance of tourism to the economy, and particularly the economy of the south west. It is clear that he is aware of where tourism sits in this State.

On 14 December I - I understand that the Attorney General will accompany me - will open the new dive park in Bunbury when the *Lena* is sunk, which is yet another icon for the south west.

Mr J.A. McGinty: I'll be there.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Well done. I thank the Attorney General.

The SPEAKER: He will not be on the boat!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We hope that he will not be on the boat when it goes down.

Mr J.A. McGinty: But soon after!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: We were thinking of inviting the Leader of the Opposition!

The new concept strategy makes available some \$3.25 million to the regional tourism organisations to develop and establish their unique brand in the marketplace. They will also assume responsibility for the marketing of their regions to the key intrastate markets and will work with the Western Australian Tourism Commission and See Australia, because part of the overall national process is to amalgamate all the current disparate groups across the nation into one super body for tourism.

There has been an enormous amount of interest in the zonal changes. More than 150 submissions have been received. The new concept for state tourism strategy was specifically designed to enhance the marketing of tourism in Western Australia for the benefit of the industry in this State. I put on record that the final paper adopted by our Government retains the five zones as outlined in the position paper. In my conversation with Minister Hockey this morning, he said that he was very pleased that Western Australia is now leading the way in ensuring that the whole State is marketed, and not just individual areas. The new concept delivers all intrastate marketing activities to the new regional tourism organisations, ensures that the RTOs will form a close partnership with the Tourism Commission and allocates funding to them through a base funding pool. A competitive pool and performance-related bonuses will also apply. The new concept for state tourism strategy also sets out the process by which the RTO boards will be established. The boards will have responsibility for creating the management structure of the new organisation. That process is now well under way in the green zone, which is the south west.

Of course there are concerns. There are always concerns when people's current roles are challenged by emerging new roles and processes. However, the concept acknowledges the importance of strong relationships between all the regional stakeholders. The concept commits us to a study of visitor servicing. I visited the visitor centre at Margaret River recently, which is leading the way in that regard. I believe the concept will be extremely successful. It will allow us to meet the challenges of future needs and will link with the national white paper that was released this morning - although, in the national scene the devil is always in the detail. Tourism is

now clearly on the map. It is possible that by 2020, tourism will be the second-biggest dollar earner for this State, preceded only by the mining and resources industry. I assure the member for Bunbury that we will work cooperatively with the green zone to make sure that the zone change process is successful.