

VALUAIR

Statement by Minister for Tourism

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Tourism) [9.07 am]: This week's announcement of the first Asian international budget carrier to fly out of Perth is a tangible sign of the way in which this Government is working to build capacity and create opportunities for Western Australians in the tourism industry. Tourism is all about jobs and the positive flow-on effects throughout the economy. The announcement by Singapore-based budget carrier Valuair that, subject to the necessary Australian aviation approvals, it will begin daily services between Perth and Singapore in December makes Western Australia the nation's first player in the low-cost airline phenomenon that is sweeping South East Asia.

I cannot overstate how important it is that we establish ourselves as a desirable destination for budget carriers and their passengers from the South East Asian region. Low-cost airlines provide access to the fastest growing travel segment; that is, discretionary leisure travel. Competitive airfares attract new visitors who would not otherwise travel to WA. They also trigger additional short trips - with Western Australia becoming something of a weekend getaway for Singaporeans. Increased air access to Western Australia continues to be a key area of focus for this Government. In the past year, air capacity has grown, with the introduction of nonstop services to Perth from Canberra, the Gold Coast and Cairns. Nonstop services have also been introduced from Sydney to Broome, complementing the Melbourne-Broome and Adelaide-Broome flights. Air New Zealand is also about to increase its flights to daily services.

Another positive flow-on effect of the Valuair announcement is the direct link it offers to exporters of fresh Western Australian produce. Valuair is working in partnership with NTUC FairPrice, a leading Singaporean supermarket chain that already stocks a large range of Australian produce. The opportunity to provide greater access to the Singaporean market for our fantastic Western Australian produce is an incredibly valuable one. Interstate visitor numbers for the 12 months ending June 2004 are up by 4.2 per cent, while international visitor numbers are up by 5.4 per cent. Initiatives such as the new online presence - westernaustralia.com - and the new branding campaign "Western Australia, The Real Thing" are designed to continue driving that upward trend in a tough global market. New facilities such as the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre add to our capacity to be seen by overseas visitors as a desirable destination.

Tourism is a key economic driver for Western Australia, and most importantly it is a creator of jobs and opportunities, particularly for young people. Already, some 80 000 people are either directly or indirectly employed in the industry. We should not underestimate the announcement made by Valuair earlier this week and the economic impact that it will have on our State through tourism and trade. As usual, the Gallop Government is determined to continue to grow business in this sector.