



Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017



Ms Jessica Shaw MLA, Chair  
Economics and Industry Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House, 4 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Ms Shaw

**RE: Parliamentary Inquiry into the COST OF REGIONAL AIR TRAVEL IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Thank you for the opportunity to address and comment on the long standing and somewhat contentious issue of the cost of regional air fares affecting large areas of Western Australia.

As owners of the Shark Bay Hotel in Denham, Western Australia which is situated in the southern Gascoyne, we have long experienced the limitations the cost of regional air fares imposes on us from a personal, business and tourism prospective

As you may well know, the Shark Bay Area is World Heritage listed and includes such well known tourism attractions as Monkey Mia. The Shark Bay area itself is a magnificent and diverse area of Australia and is quite unique to anything else in the world. Over the 40 plus years my husband has been travelling to, and holidaying in Denham, we have witnessed numerous expressions of delight and wonder on the faces of visitors when they experience this amazing part of our country.

We purchased the Shark Bay Hotel in September 2011. At that time we had owned a house in Denham for the purposes of holidays for us, our families and friends, for quite some time. When the Shark Bay Hotel came onto the market we decided we would try to purchase it and restore it to its former days as a meeting place for locals and an acceptable, family friendly facility for tourists. The job was somewhat daunting given the physical state of the hotel and its previous poor reputation.

The cost of an air fare between Perth and Monkey Mia has long been an issue for us. We live in South Perth and travel to Denham several times a year, averaging six to eight trips per annum. We would be able to take at least four of those trips by air if the fares were more reasonable and our family and friends assure us they would also make the trip more frequently if they did not have to face that nine hour drive north. We would also be able to avail our senior staff of training opportunities if we were able to fly them to Perth to attend courses. One of our main concerns of spending more time in Denham for us is that, as we age, (now in our mid 60s), we are experiencing some minor health issues and the cost of needing to fly back to Perth to attend to medical appointments can be prohibitive and has, on occasion, prevented us from attending our business in case the need should arise for us to access decent medical assistance. I know this is an issue for many of the residents of Shark Bay as the local population includes a high number of retirees.

Now that we have placed ourselves squarely in the “tourism industry”, the accessibility of tourist destinations is obviously one that concerns us. I read with great interest and agreement, an article in the West Australian newspaper on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July. The article (included) was written by journalist Gareth Parker and is titled “A State well worth exploring”. Gareth sums up well what I have been struggling to put into words in my submission to you. He deals with the question of tourism development for Western Australia and I would refer you to his article (which does not examine the role of reasonable air fares).

For tourists planning a trip to Western Australia, this is a decisive factor. Most overseas tourists are limited in time for their holiday and when facing the vastness of Western Australia there is no better way to maximize their experience than flying between destinations. Places like Broome, Shark Bay, Exmouth on the coast and then inland experiences like Karijini, Kununurra and the Kimberley to name a few, are places that all tourists, foreign and Australian, would enjoy and many have these destination on their “bucket lists”. However, in speaking with some of our hotel guests, the time element dictates travel by air as the only possible way to see enough of WA to make their trip to the west worthwhile. All of the people we have had this conversation with tell us that the cost of regional air fares are totally prohibitive and have the potential to add an amount to their holiday spend which they are not able to justify. Thus their WA experience has to be limited and given that we are such an isolated state, many tourists are reluctant to travel here again despite the fact that they would “love to”.

Now that the “mining boom” is supposedly over, there is a need for the State Government to be focusing on tourism and I do believe this is a fact which the Government recognises. With Australia still being able to enjoy the status of a safe country to visit, I feel we need to maximize on this and do all we can to encourage visitors to see something unique and beautiful and to make this POSSIBLE for them. Tourists are not going to be willing to spend large sums on an air fares from an eastern state capitals such as Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane just to see Perth alone. They will want to experience more of this state and whilst the Margaret River and even Albany may be considered reasonably accessible by road, the appealing northern regions are not.

We have enormous competition for the tourism dollar with places like Bali being accessible and cheap. I could not count the number of times I have heard people say “why would I spend \$400+ on just an air fare to Monkey Mia when I can have a week in Bali for that?” It’s a good question if you like Bali!! We have to be competitive. The foreshore in Denham is absolutely ideal for kid’s holidays. The water of the Bay is quiet and safe, brilliant water quality. It’s fantastic to see kids on school holidays just having some good old fashion fun on the foreshore.

So, in closing, I sum up by saying that the current situation of exorbitant regional air fares encompass issues such as regional populations being able to access medical assistance which is not available in their domestic area and the looming question of tourism and the immediate need to make the vastness of WA a less daunting question when tourists are considering a holiday and adventure in our state.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to comment and appeal our situation and trust that you will take into consideration my submission.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kerry Jones'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the top of the 'J'.

Kerry Jones  
Shark Bay Hotel  
43 Knight Terrace  
DENHAM WA 6537



# A State well worth exploring

■ Gareth Parker



A change is as good as a holiday, so the cliché goes. Even better, it turns out, is an actual holiday, which is what I took over the past two weeks. And thus, I was reminded of the benefits of unplugging from the media cycle for just a little bit, stepping back from the daily din.

This effort was greatly assisted by a smart phone that went for a swim in Shark Bay, but more on that in a bit.

What matters of consequence and import, what affairs of State and nation were missed in the intervening period?

Well, I came back to work on Monday to the headlines from Canberra that the Government is embroiled in a civil war between the current and former prime ministers.

Nothing new there, in fact not for the past six years.

Internationally, Donald Trump made offensive and vulgar comments against women, specifically the French first lady.

This was supposedly further damage to a man who has confounded polite society for more than two years now by ignoring every conventional rule of politics on his way to, as he would put it, “winning bigly”.

It was revealed that his idiot son Donald Jr met a Russian carpetbagger and I could only laugh when this was described in media reports as the “biggest scandal yet” facing his administration.

I won’t hold my breath awaiting the drawing up of the articles of impeachment.

In our fair State, nothing at all was missed on the political front, mainly because the Premier and half his Government were also on holidays, leaving deputy premier Roger Cook managing more portfolios than Goldman Sachs.

While the world turned, I had the good fortune to explore some of our State’s glorious North and Mid West (especially



Illustration: Don Lindsay

## The Ningaloo and Shark Bay areas are extraordinary

Exmouth, Monkey Mia, Kalbarri and parts in between).

With global air fares so affordable these days, one is easily lured to foreign shores, leaving our own backyard tragically under-explored.

The only regret here is that this didn’t happen sooner.

The natural wonders of the State’s northern half are well known to that well travelled lot known as the grey nomads.

But even they struggle to get a camp site during school holidays (the winter break being the peak of the tourist peak).

I’ve seen plenty of WA’s northern population centres, though typically these trips have been on assignment with this newspaper and the chief of staff did not suggest packing the bathers, mask and flippers.

Everyone who’s ever been, says that the snorkelling at

Ningaloo is without parallel — “it’s like walking off the beach into a tropical aquarium”, they say. Yeah, yeah. Turns out they are absolutely correct.

Who knew?

The Ningaloo and Shark Bay world heritage areas, plus Kalbarri National Park — preserved so well by the Department of Parks and Wildlife are, as the tourism campaign keeps telling us, extraordinary experiences.

But it does get you thinking about whether, if we’re truly to develop the sort of tourist economy that governments bang on about, we’ve quite got the mix right.

We drove our way around and it’s true up and down the State, and the distances are vast, which will always place some limit on the accessibility of these places.

I was surprised at the number of European and Asian tourists who had packed up the camper and braved the drive — but surely there are massive markets to be tapped if the accommodation and logistics were taken to another level.

What typically happens in WA when you even breathe a suggestion that more

sophisticated development might be a boon is that someone jumps down your throat and declares “We don’t want to be another Gold Coast”, as if that is the only other global model of tourism available to us.

In the same way that, on the internet, Godwin’s Law holds that the person who first mentions Hitler or the nazis in an online discussion thread is deemed automatically to have lost the argument, I propose that Parker’s Law holds same for mention of the Gold Coast in discussions about WA development (this goes for metropolitan coastal development, too).

While the caravan parks and the motels are great — especially for families seeking an affordable getaway — and should not be lost, there has to be other opportunities to do more of the truly innovative, environmentally sensitive eco-tourist ventures that would attract international visitors in a way that does not undermine the natural beauty that brings people here in the first place.

An adjunct suggestion is to established operators in the towns themselves, especially

food and beverage operations who seem to run opening and kitchen hours to suit themselves rather than their customers. One water-view pub, which shall remain nameless, simply abuses its customers by opening the kitchen for dinner service only at 6pm, ensuring that at five minutes to the hour, a snaking queue forms dozens deep that takes at least 20 minutes to clear (you’ll know all about it if you’ve been there).

What a way to treat people as the sun makes its descent, standing to queue rather than enjoy a beverage.

More operators need to follow the lead of the new brew-pub venture in Exmouth, named Froth, which matches innovative food, first-class and friendly service and reasonable prices. What a concept. The owners work on the floor, and you can see they care. Hats off.

One thing that has to go, though, is the drone. Not the barfly with the boring stories, but the remote-controlled flying things which, frankly, are becoming pests at some of our most beautiful vistas.

Both a Monkey Mia sunset and turquoise blue day at Kalbarri’s Eagle gorge were interrupted by the annoying hum of tourists who no doubt captured some spectacular HD footage for their home movie, but gave everyone else the absolute “you-know-whats” while making one wish for a BB gun with a well-calibrated sight.

So about that phone, which liked the look of Denham so much that it went for a swim.

The expense of replacing it has yet to borne, but what a blessing in disguise its loss turned out to be.

Instead of mindlessly thumbing through social media feeds, I actually used the down time to read 500 pages of real life book, Thomas Keneally’s Australians, which features real-life paper pages and everything. And that was a welcome change indeed.

■ Gareth Parker presents the 6PR Morning Program.  
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