

BUSSELTON MARGARET RIVER AIRPORT EXPANSION

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [4.36 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be debated forthwith —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for showing little interest in airline services to the Busselton Margaret River Airport and particularly breaking a commitment given by the Minister for Regional Development that should an airline be secured then she would fund the new terminal building.

I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the opportunity to put this issue back on the agenda at today's sitting.

Standing Orders Suspension — Amendment to Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [4.37 pm]: I move —

To insert after “forthwith” —

, subject to the debate being limited to 10 minutes for government members and 10 minutes for non-government members

I liked the member's earlier motion. This one condemns; the other one did not. It is very nasty of the member! Had I known he was going to do that, I would not have approved it! I am happy for the debate to be taken as per the amendment to the motion.

Amendment put and passed.

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion, as Amended

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Members, as this is a motion without notice to suspend standing orders, it will need the support of an absolute majority for it to proceed. If I hear a dissentient voice, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.

Motion

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [4.38 pm]: I move the motion. This project was one of the most outstanding projects to get on the agenda of the last Liberal–National government. The sod was turned in February 2017. There was roughly \$70 million for the whole project, significant royalties for regions funds from the state, nearly \$10 million of commonwealth money and, of course, a big commitment and skin in the game from the City of Busselton. More significantly, it had the support of the 12 shires in the south west, because they would get a spin-off benefit from an airline flying in from the eastern states. It was even supported by the member for Bunbury. Unfortunately, he is not here. I could quote a number of things from his campaign. When in opposition, he wanted to stand right beside it, but when in government, he seems to be backing away a tad.

Right from the outset this project has not really had commitment and support from this government. There are two significant parts of the project—firstly, the upgrade of the airstrip to allow bigger planes to come in from the east and potentially internationally, and, secondly, the upgrade of the terminal building commensurate with getting services from those areas. If we do not have that, we do not have something that will make it attractive to people who want to be part of a service coming into the south west. Right from the outset, the Minister for Regional Development has not been supportive of this project. She tried to take the money back. She could not pull back on the airstrip funding but has been able to pull back on the terminal building funding, and has put that aside and said, “We'll wait until you secure an airline before we commit to that.” We even have a quote in PerthNow from 30 September last year in an article by Geoffrey Thomas that says —

“As soon as an airline shows genuine interest and signs up we will be build a terminal,” Ms MacTiernan said.

That is in black and white in the paper. Another article in WAtoday by Hannah Barry on 5 October 2018 titled “Failure to launch: How a major WA infrastructure project was grounded” quotes these comment of the minister —

“Funding of around \$12 million for the new terminal component is pending until we have an agreement with an airline to provide a service to the airport.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 15 October 2019]

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Mr Terry Redman; Mr David Templeman; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Paul Papalia

On the public record, the minister has said, “You get an airline; we’re going to deliver on a terminal building for you.” Even the South West Development Commission tried to support this. It was keeping close links with the City of Busselton and it even let the contract for the terminal building happen. A day later the minister said, “No, I want you to pull that.” That cost \$120 000. Once again, there is no real commitment from this government. It was not close to it, it did not own it, and it was not supportive of trying to drive an outcome for the south west of Western Australia. It was even awkward for the Minister for Tourism, who was at the launch of Taste Great Southern. I recall that Verity James was the emcee for the evening. The minister was giving his spiel and when he was spruiking tourism in Western Australian, she shouted from the side, “What about the Busselton airport?” We did not want to talk about the Busselton airport! We did not want to put that on the agenda! It was clearly an awkward moment for this minister. We have the minister saying on the public record, “You secure an airline; we will build the building.” What happened when they secured an airline? The City of Busselton has done the heavy lifting on this project. It has secured an airline for three years, not two; I understand the minister today said two years. That is a pretty solid commitment, and the flights will go to a terminal that is substandard. Once more, the government has committed some funding to that, \$3 million in total as I understand, some of which will go to a new terminal, but why the hell would the government fund an upgrade of an existing terminal to meet the needs of an airline coming from the eastern states for \$3 million in total when for \$12 million it could build a new terminal that is commensurate with the services that it should be providing? This government is not behind this project. Even the advice from Tourism WA lends a level of support. The minister said during estimates —

As far as I understand it, Tourism WA was never leading negotiations on aviation at Busselton. If that were the case under the previous government, I do not think would be appropriate anyway.

He does not like them getting in that space. Later, the media announcement that came out about Jetstar being secured read —

The McGowan Government, through the South West Development Commission and Tourism WA, has worked closely with the City of Busselton to take the project from the business case stage to development to securing an airline service.

When it happens, the government wants to stand right next to it. Beforehand, it was going extremely soft on the issue.

We also have Lonely Planet securing the Margaret River region in the south west as the best destination in the Asia Pacific in 2019. Why would the government not come in behind it and support the building of a terminal to make sure that we get the best experience when those people come in March next year? The Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association is doing an outstanding job to lift the standards and cooperation right throughout the south west region between all those shires and tourism operators, bringing in hire cars and the like, to make sure that when the first plane lands, people will have a good experience. Why would we not make sure they have a half-decent terminal that matches the infrastructure that has already been invested in there and support a state-of-the-art facility for the south west of Western Australia? I do not know. One reason might be that they are a little concerned it might start to cannibalise Perth. Once again, this is a metro-centric government that is not thinking of the regions or the south west, and not supporting the project.

I know the minister will stand up and say that we do not want it. I cannot think of an airline that would not want a new terminal. The government just does not want to have something that has a higher cost. The City of Busselton has committed that if there is a new terminal, it will not pay any more than what it will pay now, so why would the government not support a significant piece of infrastructure in Western Australia that supports tourism?

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [4.44 pm]: I would also like to contribute to this motion today, and I can perhaps answer the question posed by the member for Warren–Blackwood about why this government would not support the expansion of the Busselton Margaret River Airport and the investment in its terminal for eastern states flights. I think it is quite obvious. It is because WA Labor has no vision for WA. We saw that when it was in opposition. WA Labor bagged the investment in Elizabeth Quay, it was a heavy opponent of Optus Stadium as well, and the current Minister for Tourism called the expansion of Perth Airport for overseas flights, an investment under the former government, a dud. How extraordinary to turn its back on an opportunity that has the potential to transform the south west region of WA. Jetstar has our confidence. It has talked about the \$40 million that it will potentially bring to the region over three years, along with 60 000 passengers. Gareth Evans this week said —

“This isn’t about a ‘deal’ for us, first and foremost it is about finding a destination that there is a market for, is a demand for and has potential, and that’s what we’ve got here.”

...

“We don’t think this is a trial, this is a new route ...”

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The reason that the terminal is required is that the current terminal can provide capacity for only 100 passengers. On Wednesdays, given that there is new investment in fly in, fly out flights from Rio Tinto, that capacity could see up to 400 people squeezing through a terminal for just over 100 passengers. It is not good enough, and this government needs to provide some genuine support for this project.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [4.47 pm]: This government called Perth Stadium a dud. It called Elizabeth Quay a dud. It called the Ningaloo Centre in Exmouth a dud. Do members know what? I think we have a dud and it is called the Minister for Tourism. He has duded regional Western Australia. He has criticised that \$17 million has been invested for a runway. The government said it was going to build a terminal if Busselton Margaret River Airport got an airline, and it got an airline. The government said it would not privatise, yet it is privatising more than ever before. It said it would not introduce taxes, but what have we seen? The highest taxes ever for people in Western Australia. It said it would keep royalties for regions, and it has not kept royalties for regions. It is a one-term government with a dud as a Minister for Tourism and a dud as a Minister for Regional Development, because it has no ticker and no commitment to the people of Western Australia who voted it in. The government made a commitment, yet it is now taking that away from people. It needs to not only build the terminal that it said it would build to ensure that we get more visitors to regional Western Australia, but, more importantly, support the local government that is backing its people and local tourism to grow tourism in Western Australia and regional Western Australia. It is absolutely vital for this state.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [4.48 pm]: What an intellectual contribution from the opposition on a very interesting discussion! I am glad members opposite can all turn up to vote on the suspension of standing orders. The reality is that this government is doing more for tourism across the regions and across the city than any previous government, and the figures show that. Today, only the National and Liberal Parties can think that these new flights can be a negative. Members opposite walk in and want to try to turn what was a great announcement about Jetstar into a negative. Why would they want to do that? Why would they want to talk down the existing terminal at the Busselton Margaret River Airport? The Liberal and National Parties want to talk down WA at every opportunity. They want to turn the announcement of direct flights between Busselton and Melbourne into a negative. Why would they want to do that? When the Minister for Water announced the new pipeline service in Denmark, the member for Warren–Blackwood criticised it. They come in here and criticise everything we do about tourism in WA when they know we are doing more than any previous government has done. Previous Liberal–National ministers used to do the cocktail circuit. They did not negotiate with airlines to get better deals for regional WA or do the hard yards for more direct flights; they basically did the cocktail circuit.

Let us go through what this government has done for airfares in regional WA. First of all, there was an inquiry into airfares, something the previous government failed to do for eight and a half years.

Mr D.T. Redman: You didn't hold it; it was a parliamentary inquiry.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: With a government majority.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will keep going. There was a report following the inquiry into regional airfares. Members opposite were in government for eight and a half years, why did they not have an inquiry into regional airfares?

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No; of course they did not. Regional Express Airlines commenced air services and a community airfare to Monkey Mia and Carnarvon.

Mr V.A. Catania: Prices to Monkey Mia and Carnarvon are still \$1 100.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central!

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister! Let your colleague go on, thank you.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: For eight and a half years, the National Party did nothing for regional airfares.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: They were traveling on a government jet. They did not care about the other airfares when they were in government.

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Mr V.A. Catania: It's \$1 800 return to Exmouth.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I call you to order for the first time and for the second time.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: With the community airfares there are the Broome affordable flights. With the residential airfare program, affordable airfares to Exmouth commenced in June 2019. Qantas removed the \$99 change fees under the Qantas residential fare program. Virgin introduced discounted fares with various booking conditions to Kalgoorlie–Karratha, Port Hedland–Newman and Broome–Karratha. The Broome affordable airfare flights continued for a second year. Then, of course, the announcement was made about Melbourne–Kununurra. Qantas reduced tariffs in Geraldton and placed a cap on airfares to Kalgoorlie and Karratha.

We want to do more and we will do more because we believe that driving down regional airfares is a priority for government. Again, when members opposite were in government for eight and a half years they did nothing on this issue. However, they come in here criticising a new flight that we support.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We support the Busselton community and these new flights as demonstrated by the commitment to the airport of a state taxpayer contribution by this and previous governments. That is a good thing and we want to work with the airline to make sure we get as many passengers as possible on those planes. We believe that Busselton and Margaret River are beautiful places to visit and major tourism attractions for the world and the other states. We support tourism in WA.

Members opposite come in here and turn a new pipeline servicing their electorate into a negative. Now they are trying to turn a new direct flight into a negative, talking down their community.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: They are talking down the quality of the services. We support it; we think it is great. I hope the Liberal and National Parties get behind this direct new service to Busselton.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [4.57 pm]: As I indicated during question time, as best I can tell, the National Party's argument is that the government should build a new terminal at Busselton to get the flights that are already happening. An airline is trialling flights to Busselton.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Mr P. PAPALIA: The member for Warren–Blackwood is right, I got it wrong; it is a three-year, not a two-year, trial. It was from memory. There is a lot going on in tourism and occasionally a number slips by me. In this case, it is a three-year trial. Jetstar Airways has agreed to fly for a three-year trial with the current facilities at Busselton. Quite rightly, in a responsible fashion, the Minister for Regional Development has indicated that subject to how that goes, she will determine whether there is a need for a larger facility to accommodate larger aircraft. In the event the trial is successful and tourist numbers are large enough to justify larger aircraft than Jetstar is initially trialling, there may be a need for a larger or different terminal. However, right now the existing terminal, which the state government has made some investment in, as the member for Warren–Blackwood has indicated, is adequate to accommodate the flights.

People may be discouraged or despondent due to what they read in their local papers or from commentary from their local members in Warren–Blackwood or Vasse, and think that somehow tourism is not going well in their local area. Let me put on the record what is happening in Margaret River, Busselton, the southern forest and the entire south west under the McGowan government: the biggest visitor numbers in history. In the 12 months to March this year, Australia's south west saw a growth of 9.8 per cent; Bunbury, 18.5 per cent; Augusta–Margaret River shire, 10.1 per cent; City of Busselton, member for Vasse, 26.4 per cent; and the Margaret River region, 17.9 per cent. Let us just contemplate that. For a year and a half the member for Vasse told everyone in the south west how terrible tourism was. She talked down businesses in her electorate and in the member for Warren–Blackwood's electorate. I do not make these figures up; they are from Tourism Research Australia data. The figures I have just read are from 12 months to March. I have more recent numbers for the south west region that are not broken down, nevertheless the 12 months to June this year saw even greater growth. I will provide the numbers of 12 months to June, but later I will get some more detailed breakdowns for the towns. Right now, members can be comfortable that there has been a 28.2 per cent growth across the south west, a 29 per cent growth in spend, and international

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numbers are growing by 21 per cent. I may have got that wrong because my eyesight is not that good. But the numbers reflect extraordinary growth. Visitors to the south west are growing in huge numbers under the McGowan government as a result of our two-year action plan.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. PAPALIA: We fixed tourism because members opposite neglected it. We will do more. Our support for the Busselton Margaret River Airport is part of it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Why are members opposite talking down tourism when it is such a good news story?

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms M.M. Quirk) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (17)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr A. Krsticevic	Ms L. Mettam	Mrs A.K. Hayden (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Dr D.J. Honey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Noes (34)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr S.J. Price	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms J. Farrer	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms C.M. Rowe	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr T.J. Healy	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms J.J. Shaw	
Mr M. Hughes	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski	

Pairs

Mr P.J. Rundle	Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr K.J.J. Michel

Question thus negatived.