

ANSETT COLLAPSE, CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

404. Mr MURRAY to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the minister advise what contingency plans have been considered for students returning home at the start of the school holidays?

Ms MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for Collie for the question. Some concern was expressed yesterday about this, but I can assure members that this matter is in hand. The Government will be arranging to give priority to students on the scheduled services, and has set up facilities in its transport call centre to coordinate that.

I am also pleased to note that some of the students may receive a particularly interesting ride home, because the Government has been talking with the RAAF, which is proposing to put on some military aircraft to transport students who are recipients of commonwealth benefits. The Government is negotiating to allow other students onto those same aircraft. So some students may go home in Hercules transports.

Efforts to get commercial interests to act quickly to get Skywest back in the air before a sale is negotiated are bearing fruit. Two operators are now prepared to wet-lease the Skywest aircraft almost immediately. Both Qantas and the private consortium led by ABN AMRO have indicated today that they wish to lease the Skywest aircraft and use the Skywest crews to get the planes into the air as soon as possible. If this can be negotiated it will not be necessary to wait for the more time-consuming process of a sale to be completed. Sorting out the insurance and indemnity issues will be a challenge, but the Government is confident that this can be done. A meeting with the administrators will be held today to see how rapidly these proposals to get a commercial solution can be put into effect.