

STATE ECONOMY — MIGRATION

**551. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Training:**

I refer to the joint press conference between the minister and the Prime Minister yesterday afternoon and note the federal government's decision to slash WA's allocation under the state nominated migration program by 70 per cent. Is the minister satisfied with the Prime Minister's comments that the skilled migrant shortfall might be made up in the future—yes or no?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members! The Minister for Training has the call.

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

Unlike the previous Liberal–National coalition government and its federal counterpart, we have a good relationship with our federal government and are able to work through a number of issues. That is certainly the case when it comes to training and skills development and it is certainly the case when it comes to the Albanese Labor government understanding the issues that are facing our state. That was nowhere better demonstrated than in the last few days when the entire federal cabinet held meetings in Western Australia and spent time around the state to understand the issues that are confronting our community, our employers, government agencies and the like. I am certainly very confident that we have a good relationship and that we can continue to work through issues.

The federal government said to both the Premier and me that it was challenged by the completely dysfunctional visa processing system that it inherited when it came to office. There was a huge backlog of applications and a lack of capacity within the public sector to manage those applications. That is one of the things that it has been working through in a number of ways. The first was a review of the entire migration system. The plethora of different visa categories is one issue; it is very confusing and complex for people to navigate. The federal government wants to improve the simplicity of the system for people who want to live, study or work in Australia. The second thing it has been working on is the time taken to process the applications, so that people get a timely response. It is working through those issues. It has put more staff into the processing system and they are working through the backlog of tens of thousands of visa applications. I understand that and take the federal government at its word. I am sure that is the case.

As the member knows, Western Australia's economy is in rude health; we are going well by every measure. But the other side of that healthy coin is that skills are in demand. As well as needing to train local people to fill those skills needs—I am looking forward to the debate on this tomorrow, as we are putting a huge effort into skilling local people—we understand that we need to bring in skilled migrants. We communicated that very forcefully to the federal government prior to its announcement about the overall number. Over the last couple of days, I have had the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Skills and Training, Hon Brendan O'Connor; briefly with the Prime Minister, including during the press conference that the member referred to; and briefly with the assistant minister for immigration. I was able to make the point to all of them that employers need skilled migrants now. The federal government needs to overcome some of the processing issues, and I understand that it is trying to work through them. What we do not want to do is to send a message to overseas markets that there will be any reduction in our capacity to host overseas —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could listen, as he might learn something.

We do not want to send the message to overseas markets that there is a foot on the hose when it comes to attracting skilled migrants to Western Australia. I appreciated the constructive dialogue with federal ministers when they were here in Western Australia, and I am confident that we will be able to reach an outcome with the federal government.

**The SPEAKER:** Just before I take the member's supplementary, I note that it is not permitted to stand at the back. You can sit in the Speaker's gallery if you like.