

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — TOURISM

Motion

HON KLARA ANDRIC (South Metropolitan) [11.26 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) commends the McGowan government for its strong commitment to the Western Australian tourism industry, particularly acknowledging the work of the Minister for Tourism and Tourism WA to revitalise Western Australia's tourism sector in a post COVID-19 and regional context; and
- (b) recognises the significance of continuing to market Western Australia to the world, improving access through increased aviation links and attracting world-class events to Western Australia.

Members of this house, I would like to set the scene. As I was saying to Hon Dr Steve Thomas on my walk into the chamber, ideally it would be really good if we could have a big billboard in the chamber because I feel that when we talk about tourism, we could really do with some visuals. Let me begin by setting the scene anyway: majestic landscapes; pristine white sand beaches; dreamy Indian Ocean sunsets; spectacular coastlines; stunning gorges; world-class snorkelling and diving; and ancient lands that are filled with magical history and culture. I know that some members might think I sound like Trevor Cochrane on an episode of Destination WA, but I am sure that members will all agree that there is only one place that comes to mind and that is Western Australia.

Whether you are exploring the maritime brilliance of the coral coast; swimming with the gentle giants in Exmouth, which I really hope I one day get to do; indulging in the beautiful wine and cuisine of the Margaret River region; immersing yourself in the landscapes of both the Kimberley and the Pilbara; taking a selfie with what would arguably be the happiest animal on the face of the planet at Rottnest; or basking on the beautiful white sands of Esperance, Western Australia is truly the place to be.

It would be very unfair of us not to share WA with the rest of the world. To put WA on the world stage, we needed to be more accessible to the international market. Thanks to the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm of Hon Paul Papalia, along with Tourism Australia and Perth Airport, a two-year action plan was established. This plan was funded with a \$425 million commitment from the McGowan government, with a major focus being direct flights. I am sure all members would recall that in March 2018, history was made with the first-ever direct flight departing Perth to London. I was very fortunate to attend the Qantas launch of the flight. Unfortunately, my destination and where I disembarked was still Perth; nevertheless, I was given the opportunity to go on the aircraft and see the aeroplane that will be taking so many Western Australians to Europe and vice versa. That flight established the first ever Western Australian gateway to Europe, making flying from Perth Airport the fastest way to travel from Australia to Europe. This new gateway saw a 2.8 per cent increase in European visitors and injected approximately half a billion dollars into the WA economy. Not only did this open WA to visitors from the UK, but it also encouraged travellers who were travelling to the UK via Western Australia to stop over and see what WA had to offer.

In early September 2019, Perth saw its gateway to Japan reopened, with direct flights from Perth to Tokyo. In 2020, we saw another first, with China Eastern Airlines' five-week flight trial between Perth and Shanghai. This trial proved to be a monumental success, with the average load factor for flights sitting at approximately 80 per cent. Unfortunately, the trial had to be paused due to the pandemic, but these figures show a promising future for the opportunities that WA has in the Chinese tourism market.

Thanks to the McGowan government and the two-year action plan, 2019 broke records with the number of international holiday visitors. A total of 536 400 visitors contributed a total of \$870 million to the WA economy in 2019 alone. The COVID-19 pandemic evidently brought international tourism to a worldwide halt. Emerging out of the pandemic, as we all know, the international aviation industry experienced a number of issues, making the market for flights extremely competitive. To combat this, however, our government announced a \$185 million Reconnect WA package in December 2021 and a further \$25 million into the aviation recovery fund. The recovery fund gave WA the edge it needed to re-establish international direct flights and target new routes to countries such as China, Germany, India and Vietnam. With the reintroduction of the London–Perth gateway in May 2022 and WA's first-ever direct connection with continental Europe via Rome, launched in June 2022, another aspect of the package was an allocation of \$65 million towards WA and the rest of the world.

In September, our government, together with Tourism WA, launched a bold advertising campaign to put WA on the world stage like never before with a campaign titled Walking on a Dream. This brand new campaign elevated WA as a unique destination. The campaign advertisement featured iconic whale sharks and WA's own stars, Aboriginal dancers and Rika Hamaguchi and Ian Wilkes performing choreographed dances across regions in WA,

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including Ningaloo Reef, Margaret River, the Kimberley and Perth. The ad's song was an exclusively reworked version of a song by Australian superstars—I know all members know this—Empire of the Sun.

Hon Sue Ellery: I did know that.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: I am not surprised, honourable member.

As part of the campaign, the westernaustralia.com website was launched as the official home of WA's tourism information for potential holiday goers. To date, the Walking on a Dream advertisement has been shown across New Zealand, Singapore, the UK and the USA. Those members fortunate enough to have been in New York for the new year would have seen the advertisement running in Times Square over the busy new year period from 26 December until 1 January. It was advertised on three multidimensional billboards. Not only did it showcase WA to the people of New York but, as we all know, the campaign also reached a global audience of over one billion people, and obviously those people who were present in Times Square celebrating the festivities. It was televised worldwide.

Walking on a Dream made its British debut on Europe's biggest digital billboard in Piccadilly Circus in January this year. I was not aware that that was the biggest, though I probably should have known. Having been advertised in two of the most prominent places in the world, it certainly paid off because the campaign saw over 790 000 users from global markets utilise the westernaustralia.com website to plan their holidays.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: It is an incredible amount, honourable member.

As we all know, at the beginning of 2022, the pandemic saw the world come to a standstill. With Australia going into quarantine, international tourists and visitors no longer graced our shores. This was a massive hit. We all know it was a massive hit for tourism in WA. However, the McGowan government, together with Tourism WA, devised one of our biggest intrastate campaigns to motivate Western Australians to explore their own backyard. This campaign was labelled "Do it in WA" and was supported by WA's five regional tourism organisations. The dedicated doitinwa.com website was used to support and advertise tourism operators and businesses across our state. I know that I will run out of time. I could talk about tourism in great depth.

With the campaign being supported by one of the state's biggest media outlets, local holiday opportunities were showcased on a monumental level and holiday goers really got on board. Covering over 2.5 million square kilometres, we needed to make these regional experiences more accessible to Western Australians. In 2021–22, the McGowan government allocated \$21.4 million to its regional aviation recovery program. Working with airlines such as Rex Airlines, Virgin Australia and Qantas, we managed to secure cheap airfares for places such as Albany, Esperance, Carnarvon and Monkey Mia. That program resulted in the biggest regional flights deal in WA history, securing 50 000 affordable airfares between Broome, Perth, Kununurra and Exmouth. The partnership between the McGowan government, Virgin Australia and Qantas helped to deliver a vital economic boost to northern WA's tourism regions which, as we all know, were quite severely impacted by COVID-19.

Following in the footsteps of Do it in WA, the Wander Out Yonder campaign—I absolutely loved that slogan!—was launched to coincide with the reopening of interstate borders. The aim was to inspire Australians to reconnect with family and friends and experience the sort of one-of-a-kind adventure that only WA can offer.

Many tourism experiences across the state were showcased. I will not list them all, but they included quokkas, swimming with whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef and the many culinary adventures in the Margaret River region. Holidaymakers were encouraged to stay for longer, go further and explore more here within our state. Western Australia has had a phenomenal tourism bounce back from COVID, and that is evident in the domestic spending figures having surpassed the pre-COVID domestic spend. I will give members some of the figures. The total domestic overnight spend reached \$1.02 billion in September 2022, which is a 37 per cent increase on the pre-COVID figures in September 2019. Domestic trips to regional WA also hit their highest level, with \$577 million in regional spending in September 2022; that is an increase on the 2019 figures of more than 32 per cent.

WA tourism is in full swing. I have so much more that I want to talk about, but once again, I am out of time. I know Hon Kyle McGinn will talk about UFC 284, which was a massive event held over last weekend. I will leave some of the facts and figures to him, but ticketing revenue for that event totalled just under \$6 million, making it the highest-grossing event in Australian history. I will leave the rest to Hon Kyle McGinn, because I know it was a fabulous event. I had a lot more to say, but I will not get the opportunity. I would like to thank the McGowan government; Tourism WA; Perth Airport; and the tourist regions of WA, with special thanks to our Minister for Tourism, Hon Roger Cook, for his great work and strong commitment to the WA tourism industry. I look forward to its continuing growth.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [11.42 am]: I want to make a few comments on behalf of the government and thank Hon Klara Andric for moving this motion. I would like to firstly acknowledge

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that when the pandemic hit WA, our tourism industry took an immediate hit. The government's border closure policies kept us safe and contributed to us being able to come through the hardest part of the pandemic, the first two-and-a-bit years, but there is no question that tourism took a hard and immediate hit from that.

As some members will know, I spend a few weeks every year in my favourite part of the world, Broome. That is my happy place, and I am going to keep going back there; I am not motivated to spend my holidays anywhere else, but there is no question that COVID had an impact on tourism operators up there. I want to commend those operators and the industry on coming through COVID and acknowledge the difficult time they had.

I will also make the point that, at the time, there were a number of industry doomsayers who claimed, on more than one occasion, that the government's policies would not only have a really negative impact on the tourism industry, but also that the industry would never recover from them. Nothing could be further from the truth, because the industry is bouncing back. If we want to see evidence of that, we need only look at regional Western Australia, where there are still Western Australians who literally took to heart the message to wander out yonder and visited places in Western Australia that they had never been to before. Not only did they visit those places for the first time during the early days of the pandemic; they are now going back, because they like those places. They are going back because they now know they are fabulous places to see in Western Australia. We also need only look at metropolitan Perth last weekend to see how the industry has, indeed, bounced back, and that those doomsayers were wrong.

I want to talk about the UFC for a minute; I know Hon Kyle McGinn is going to share with us probably more information than we want about his enjoyment of the UFC! I will say upfront that it is not my cup of tea, but my view is that it is not directed at the 60-plus female demographic! I met a woman who participates in it, and I was like, "Oh my God, she's into it!" She is a teacher and she is seriously into it. I know Hon Kyle McGinn is going to talk about that, so I will not steal his thunder, but I think it needs to be noted that about 9 000 of the huge crowd that attended that event came from outside WA. Event tourism is working, and working well. Those people came here from all over the country to see it.

Other global events we have had in WA include: the Margaret River Pro 2022; the Australian Masters Games in April 2022; the NRL State of Origin, June 2022; Wallabies v England rugby, July 2022; Perth's Festival of International Football tournament, featuring Crystal Palace, Leeds United, Manchester United—yay!—and Aston Villa; the ICC T20 World Cup, October 2022; and the United Cup, December 2022 to January 2023. It is estimated that about \$90 million was spent in WA by visitors to those events. Events that are coming up include: the 2023 Australian Surf Life Saving Championships in March 2023; the Australian Rowing Championships, also in March; the Margaret River Road in April; the Dark Sky Festival in April, which I think will be massive; High Voltage in May; the FIFA Women's World Cup, which again is going to be massive, in July; and the Hockey Australia Mega Masters Championships in September 2023.

Hon Klara Andric referenced Tourism WA's global partnerships campaign. It is worth noting that it has delivered some 38 000 bookings across our key international markets, with an average campaign reach of some 118 million people. In the latest reported annual figures, domestic tourism grew by more than six per cent on pre-COVID levels. That reinforces the point I made at the beginning of my comments: those who said that the border closure policy that kept us safe would destroy the WA tourism industry forever were wrong. I am glad that they were wrong. I am sorry that they obviously felt so anxious at the time that they made those comments, but they were wrong. This government took seriously the need to invest in and plan for tourism after the reopening of our borders, and we did that. The results are paying off and I am confident that they will continue to pay off.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [11.49 am]: I probably should not be surprised that Hon Kyle McGinn is a fan of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. I am not sure what would lead me that way. Possibly the haircut, but I am sure we will have a good description. I am not sure why Hon Kyle McGinn thinks the UFC is so good. Surely the Labor caucus is more active. Surely that would be more fun.

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There is more blood on the ground there, surely.

I thank Hon Klara Andric for the motion. Obviously, I do not necessarily agree with commending the McGowan government, but there are some important issues to discuss here. The major point I want to make is through the following example. The member listed a range of fantastic tourism destinations around the state of Western Australia, which is great, but for the south west and great southern I heard her mention Margaret River a number of times, but I do not think anywhere else. My first point is that we have to invite the honourable member down to the south west and great southern so that she can see some of the other great areas that we have. It will demonstrate where we could make some improvements to tourism policy. This is not a fresh discussion. I had the same conversation with the Minister for Police; then the Minister for Tourism.

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Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The member comes down a lot, I know. We should put a tax on it. We would probably make some money out of him. Now that Hon Darren West has had a good crop, he should be willing to pay.

It is a great area. The Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association does a fantastic job. In regional tourism, it is the elephant in the room, because it has great resources and it is well organised. Sharna Kearney is the CEO, and she does a fantastic job down there. My old friend Steve Harrison who has been there for, I will not say how many years because it will embarrass him, but a very long time, is in its management team. They do a fantastic job. Margaret River's branding is absolutely dominant. If someone travels around the world and calls into Paris, Hong Kong or Tokyo and is asked, "Where are you from?" and they say Donnybrook, as I do, people will have never heard of that. Most of them have not even heard of the state of Western Australia, and they get a blank look for Perth. Do not try Bunbury, that will not work. But if they say Margaret River, people recognise the branding of Margaret River. It is a worldwide brand. That is great for Margaret River; it does a great job. It has great attractions, good administration and it does it really well. But there is an issue in tourism.

Rather than just commending the government, we might get improvement if we look at destination marketing for the rest of the regions. Why is that important? People think of Margaret River for the south west and great southern. The tourism offering in those areas is fantastic, and I would say that the great southern competes on wine industry and tourism offering with Margaret River these days. Margaret River might run me out of town for saying so, and it is probably lucky I switched offices, but it is a fantastic offering. There are offerings further afield from the midwest further north and the goldfields—all those things. What happens in tourism administration in Western Australia is important. Tourism Western Australia in my view is highly fixed on major events such as the UFC, for example, and Hon Kyle McGinn will tell us about it in more detail. Those major events are great; they attract a lot of people into the state of Western Australia. Most of them stay in Perth, because the major events are in Perth, such as the tennis and cricket. I am glad to see that rugby league and rugby union came here; that is fantastic. We are trying to lift the standards. I still think it has the biggest crowds in the stadium, which is great. All those things are fantastic. Only a trickle of those people go out to regional destination points though.

This is not a new issue for this government; this issue has been there for a long time. The job for government is how to get that trickle out to be more of a flow out to the regions, and an issue is that there are a lot of tiers of tourism administration. If we look at the south west, for example, we start at Tourism Western Australia, which is focused on major events in Perth, effectively. It has the big budget. There is where all the millions of dollars go. The sponsorships provide millions of dollars and attract a lot of people in. Then there are the regional tourism organisations. Australia's South West is the next level down. That covers everywhere. It is based in Bunbury, but after some agitation it now has a staff member in Albany as well. It is trying to cover the entire south west. Australia's South West is the next level tourism body. Then there are the individual tourism bodies, such as the Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association, which is the elephant in the room. It probably out competes Australia's South West for example. In the area that it is in, it is predominant.

The issue is if someone is a tourism operator in a regional area who wants to talk about destination marketing, particularly in Perth. The vast majority of tourism dollars being spent in regional Western Australia come from the Perth market. It is a majority domestic market. That is not to say that international is not important—it is—as are the grey nomads who go around Australia. In my patch they swing around—I am not there yet, I am getting there—and they go around through Albany, they pick a way to go across to Margaret River and they come up through Perth and head north. They are usually down our way in the summer and up north in Hon Kyle McGinn's patch in the winter during the dry season. They are important, but the domestic market is the bulk. It is the big one. We have to attract people to those domestic market places. Attracting people to Margaret River does not matter, because everyone goes there now. Half of WA gets married there these days. The tourism operations down there are very good, but marketing elsewhere is an issue. Where does a tourism operator plug in? What is their point? Do they plug in at the local community tourism group? Do they plug in at their regional tourism association or do they try to get somewhere with Tourism WA? It does not work very well.

We have had this conversation in the great southern for many years, including with the previous Labor minister. There was a thing down there called the Amazing South Coast, which was a great opportunity to market the southern coast line towards Esperance, but more importantly around Bremer Bay, Albany, Denmark and Walpole to bring people down there. It was a great tourism offering, but it could not survive, because there were three layers of administration and three layers of authorisation taking place. I said to the minister at the time that I do not know that the Amazing South Coast is the best vehicle for tourism in the great southern, but the government and the minister has to pick one. They have to pick one, get behind it and make it work. If they do not like Amazing South Coast, that is fine, I am not wedded to it, put something else in place that delivers what we are talking about, which is coordination of the tourism offering and then, most importantly, destination marketing for all those regional areas that do not have good destination marketing right now. People in Perth, tend to go to the south west. It is a two-hour

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drive, two and a half hours to my place and about the same for Hon Jackie Jarvis's home, and a lot of people come down there on the weekend. At two and a half to three hours they get to Margaret River and Augusta. It is only an hour and a half further if they want to go to Albany down Albany Highway, but people think it is too far, because we do not market a really good way to say: this is great domestic tourism and here is the offering we have down here.

Destination marketing for a lot of other areas is not at the same level as it is for the Margaret River region. Well done to Sharna and Steve; they do a fantastic job. We should not belittle the work that they do. They are great leaders in that industry, but the other areas need some support. The ultimate goal is to have a more integrated and coordinated process. It is a different cost and different application process to join different levels of the tourism administration. Operators can join their local tourism association, or perhaps the chamber of commerce in their local town and the tourism group. Then, if they want to do Australia's South West, they have to join that separately, as well as Tourism WA. They all have separate memberships with a lack of coordination. It is remarkably disjointed. For an integrated tourism experience, it would be better if at some point, in a bipartisan manner, we all had a conversation. This is the sort of motion we could spend days on in how to get that greater coordination around all the regions. There are some attempts to do it; it does happen. It is not as if there is no work in this area, but it is still absolutely a shortfall, and it is one that has been there for as long as I have been around politics, which is now measured in decades rather than years. It is something that we could look at, and that the government could look at, to get a more integrated process for marketing in particular that is not just those great big events, which are fantastic. Bring the rugby league and rugby union back every year and I would be a very happy man. There should be more of it.

Hon Donna Faragher: So would my husband.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, excellent. I knew he was a good fellow.

Hon Donna Faragher: He's from New South Wales, though.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, the game played in heaven. That is something the government could improve with.

HON DAN CADDY (North Metropolitan) [11.59 am]: It is a pleasure to speak on this motion brought to the chamber by my good friend Hon Klara Andric.

In late 2021, the Premier announced the government's Reconnect WA package, designed to reopen Western Australia to interstate and overseas tourists. The \$195 million of funding was unprecedented. The package covers elements in both limbs of Hon Klara Andric's motion, including aviation connections to Perth, which is something I will talk about in a little bit of detail later.

I want to pick up on something the Leader of the House mentioned. She spoke very eloquently about the people who were worried that the government's management of COVID to keep Western Australians safe would destroy the tourism industry. It should not be forgotten that those sentiments were echoed in statements by members opposite, not so much in this chamber but in the other place. As was often the case during the fortieth Parliament and is trending towards being the case in the forty-first Parliament, those members were very wrong. They lambasted the government for the measures that it was taking while the government was putting in place record aid packages for the tourism sector. That aid coupled with the amazing success of the Reconnect WA package is something that members on this side of the chamber can be very proud of.

I want to talk about the numerous partnership packages—I guess that is what one would call them—that have been put together with the aviation sector and, if I get time, I will talk about business tourism and even sports tourism. It should be obvious why I want to refer specifically to the packages with the aviation sector: Perth is the most isolated capital in the world and Western Australia is one of the largest jurisdictions in the world. Air transport is a critical link, a critical lifeline, that connects us and underpins so much of our tourism industry.

Hon Klara Andric outlined some flight partnerships, but I want to quite quickly outline the breath of those partnerships. The direct flight between Perth and Rome took off in June last year, as Hon Klara Andric mentioned. The important thing everyone needs to realise is that these sorts of partnerships do not just happen. That flight was worked on at length with the airline and connections at each end. It was a direct result of hard work put in by the then minister and the people around him. Earlier this year, All Nippon Airways announced the return of its Tokyo to Perth flight. In the year before COVID, we saw nearly 40 000 Japanese visitors to Western Australia, which put about \$71 million into the WA economy. Once again, I want to make the point that this does not just happen; it takes leadership by government, the minister, the minister's staff and hardworking public servants. Everyone does their bit to ensure that we get at an outcome for Western Australia, with a boost in the number of tourists coming to Western Australia.

In December 2022, Philippine Airlines announced the launch of direct flights from Perth to Manila. That flight had been foreshadowed but was cancelled because of COVID; it did not actually take off. Once again, the only way that these fantastic partnerships that benefit Western Australia remained front of mind of all the players involved while the world went through a pandemic was through the hard work of this government's ministers and officials. We have worked hard to restore aviation capacity. We are now at over 75 per cent of where we were pre-COVID

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and that is increasing. Our focus is toward building consumer demand for the restored services and, no doubt, looking at new links across the globe to bring in international tourists.

As well as international aviation, this government has worked hard on regional and interstate aviation. Hon Klara Andric talked about that in some detail so I will not go into it, but it brings people from interstate directly to our regions. The regional centres of Broome, Exmouth and Kununurra have benefited from these services previously and that will continue. Again, all these initiatives require constant work. Ministers Cook, Papalia and Templeman have had carriage of the tourism portfolio and have worked hard to make sure that this has happened, as have the incredibly hardworking public servants. Hard work is a hallmark of the McGowan government. For example, there is the hard work of ministers and their staff, members and public servants in the tourism portfolio. This government is known for working hard.

I am running out of time and I want to talk about business tourism. I want to give a shout-out to Business Events Perth. In December last year, one year after the announcement of the Reconnect WA package, I had the great privilege of representing the Premier at Business Events Perth's fiftieth anniversary. I got to personally congratulate the CEO, Mr Gareth Martin, and his team on achieving that massive milestone. Business Events has been at the forefront of bringing events to Perth for 50 years. It is a leading light in the promotion of business tourism.

I wanted to give a shout-out to Business Events Perth because, as we all know, during COVID even local organised events and functions were being cancelled or held online. The idea that people could meet without being in the same room took off across the world. It was potentially the biggest challenge to Business Events in 50 years, but BE and its member organisations were adaptive, agile and resilient, and focused on what they could do in their rapidly changing circumstances. BE responded swiftly during the pandemic to ensure Western Australia remained nationally and internationally competitive through collaboration with partners to embrace innovation and see what they could do with technology to make sure Perth had business tourism events and remained a business tourism destination forefront in everyone's mind. I have to applaud its focus on supporting local events as well, boosting confidence in in-person meetings to sustain the sector and jobs, and increasing market awareness to keep Perth at the forefront of everyone's minds. BE worked extremely hard knowing the pandemic would one day come to an end, bidding for and securing international and interstate events in the medium-to-long term. It embraced technology to host virtual site inspections so adventurers did not have to come here. BE used the technology that, for want of a better word, we were being "forced" to use to bring in people and show them what it had to offer when COVID finished.

During that time of uncertainty, BE managed to get together a host of events to take place in 2022. I will quickly go through a few of them. BE hosted 15 health and medical life science business events, six tourism and creative industries events, 11 education sector events, four primary industry business events, and nine mining and medical sector events. The work of this organisation despite the circumstances was absolutely incredible. In a major coup, the ICEF ANZA 2023 is expected to add nearly a million bucks to the state economy next year. It is a direct result of the hard work by the people at BE Perth and their collaboration with StudyPerth, not forgetting the hard work of the people in the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

I have run out of time to speak about sports tourism, but I know Hon Kyle McGinn is champing at the bit to get that. Well done to the BE team, your work in the most trying conditions deserves praise from all members of this place.

The DEPUTY CHAIR (Hon Steve Martin): I give the call to Hon Kyle McGinn, and I am looking forward to this.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.09 pm]: Famous last words! Thank you, Acting President. In the words of the amazing Bruce Buffer, "It's time!" for nine amazing minutes from the member for the Mining and Pastoral Region on UFC 284, Perth, Western Australia. That was my attempt at Bruce Buffer; it was probably not the best, but I will say that I am very excited to get up and talk about the UFC 284, which took place on the weekend. It was a phenomenal week, and it has been a phenomenal build-up.

Members have mentioned some of the figures that have come out of it and all the add-ons we got for Western Australia. Last week, the CBD was alive. Over 9 000 people came from interstate for this event. This event was promised to us a few years ago, but it was obviously put off during COVID. The UFC honoured its commitment to come back to Perth, which I thought was amazing.

I went to UFC 221, which was the first one held here after the McGowan government made the amazing effort of legalising the octagon here in Western Australia. It was one of the best decisions to see a government do, because it is a sport, it is respectful and it has professionalism. I know some people look down on ultimate fighting, but I will say that I have been supporting it since I was a kid. It comes with respect and professionalism. The UFC organisation itself is a well-organised machine. When it puts on an event, it puts it on.

The main event was Alexander "the Great" Volkanovski, who is the featherweight champion of the world and from Sydney, Australia. It was the first time since he has held the title belt that he was able to fight here in Australia.

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I will say that the support for him was unbelievable. I know my colleague Hon Matthew Swinbourn, who is also a huge UFC fan, was very —

Several members interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: People would be very surprised that there are UFC fans who have law degrees. Unbelievably, people with law degrees support ultimate fighting.

We also saw a stacked Australian fighter card. One of my favourite fighters is Jimmy Crute, who came out and was on a losing streak. He came into the fight and was an absolute warrior. It went three rounds and ended up being a majority draw, which is very rare to see in the UFC. The heart that was shown was unbelievable.

A name that I am sure everyone in this room is now aware of because it was screamed for over two weeks is Jack Della Maddalena's. Jack is a Perth fighter, and he is the first to get into the UFC and fight on home soil here in Perth. He took the fight for all of half a round and won his fourth fight in a row in the UFC in the first round. He is set to be a future champion of the UFC, and he comes from right here, from Perth. He has fought his way up through Eternal and all the other awesome organisations that put fighters onto a pedestal to try to get them into the UFC. It is no easy feat. The UFC fighters are seen as the best fighters in the world. Our man Jack Della Maddalena went out there and wiped the floor with Randy Brown from America, who was getting very lippy at the media conference, but I am sure is now eating his words on his plane ride back to America.

We also had Josh Culibao, who had a huge comeback in his fight. He was unfortunately hit with a low blow during the fight—a direct side kick into his nether regions—and was in a world of pain, but he came back, got a submission and won that fight. It was unbelievable.

The atmosphere in RAC Arena was something that I do not think could be matched. I have been to the State of Origin at Optus Stadium, but the atmosphere in RAC Arena with a packed house was amazing, especially when Volkanovski walked out to a very Aussie song. The crowd went absolutely ballistic. When Jack Della Maddalena won, the crowd was really about to boil over.

All the build-up was about how there would be problems because UFC fans are reckless; there could be fights and everything else. I cannot stress enough that that was the same build-up before UFC 221, but nothing happened. I can tell everyone again that the crowd was unreal. They walked out after the event. There were no issues. There were plenty of police around, but everyone was really respectful.

As said earlier, the event was the highest grossing arena event in Australian history. That is unbelievable. There were 6 000 people who attended the ceremonial weigh-ins, and 6 000 people also attended the media conference. Yes, I was there and, yes, I was fanboying really hard. It was unreal. The atmosphere for the whole week was unbelievable.

Fighters from around Australia who were not fighting attended, such as Rob “the Reaper” Whittaker, Dan “the Hangman” Hooker, Kai Kara-France, Tai “Bam Bam” Tuivasa and Israel Adesanya. We even had Ragnar Lothbrok here! Believe it or not! Yes, Travis Fimmel was here. He is the actor from *Vikings* and was spotted in the crowd. I see the Leader of the Opposition go, “Whoa! There were Vikings in Perth?”

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: My wife watched the whole series, so I have seen quite a fair bit of it.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Excellent. One of the other great fights that I watched was Justin Tafa, a heavyweight. Two heavyweights came out, and I think it lasted two minutes. Justin Tafa did a walk-off KO, which was unbelievable. Fans were really treated.

Over 9 000 visitors came from interstate. The competition was televised in 172 countries, and millions of people watched. Millions of people also watched the build-up. Tourism WA, VenuesWest and everyone helped out with a series called *Embedded*, which is done before each fight. The series shows the fighters getting around Perth and where they go, and it shows the crowd events, like the open workouts. Thousands of people were down at the quay watching the open workouts. I do not think it had ever seen a crowd so engaged in going to these events.

We also saw it bring along some celebrities with massive Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat followings. That is what we are after as it brings people from around the world to this beautiful place in Western Australia. Logan Paul and KSI—I know members in this place probably look at me blankly when I say these names, but they are very influential YouTubers and podcasters. My friend Amy Astill, out in Kalgoorlie, was ecstatic not because of the UFC but because Logan Paul and KSI were here. People travelled here just to try to get a glimpse of those people. Another fellow that Logan Paul does his podcast with is Mike Majlak. Mike stayed at Crown Towers, and his Snapchat followers saw him go to restaurants and rate all the food. That is what he does: he rates burgers and he rates food to his millions of followers. He was rating 10 out of 10 at all the places he went to in Perth. When he arrived in Sydney, he said that he missed Perth already. It was really good to see that. That was phenomenal.

Hon Klara Andric; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Sandra Carr

I send a huge shout-out to the crowd and to the UFC supporters. The McGowan government believed that it was the right thing to do in 2017, and we have had two major events under this government. Perth constantly fights above its weight to try to get sporting events from the east coast. I get furious when I talk about the cricket and the games we miss out on. I think it is insulting. We have one of the best stadiums, if not the best stadium, in Australia. We saw what happened in Brisbane with its pitch. We see how the Sydney event gets washed out almost every single year, but they still do not move it to Perth. It is absolutely insulting. Who won the World Cup for Australia in the 2020 series? Mitchell Marsh won the World Cup. Where did he come from? Perth, Western Australia. Let us not forget about that.

Just to touch on a couple of things—the solar eclipse is coming up in Exmouth. Thousands and thousands of people from around the world will be going to Exmouth to see about 60 or 70 seconds of an eclipse, but they will be travelling right up the state. I say to Hon Dr Steve Thomas that, when it comes to getting people out of Perth, the eclipse is one of those events for which people will travel from Perth all the way to Exmouth, potentially on to Karijini and further up north to Broome and Onslow. There will be massive add-ons from that.

Hon Peter Collier is on urgent parliamentary business, but Kalgoorlie has a lot to offer as well. In 2017, an event called the Kalgoorlie Desert Race was created, and it is now massive. Literally thousands of people come from all over Australia to race bikes, cars and trucks in the desert in Kalgoorlie. It is very reminiscent of the Finke Desert Race in the middle of Australia, and I think it is only getting bigger and bigger.

On a final note, we had an amazing UFC event. The UFC was unbelievable. I thank Mark McGowan and the Labor Party for seeing the value in legalising the octagon in Western Australia. To the UFC, I say thank you for coming to Perth. Alexander “the Great” Volkanovski, you got robbed, mate; you won that fight. Unfortunately, he lost his belt to Islam Makhachev and is not the greatest in the world. Still, pound for pound, the number one is Alexander “the Great” Volkanovski.

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [12.19 pm]: I rise today to also support the motion moved by Hon Klara Andric. I will probably not be able to do it with quite the finesse that Hon Kyle McGinn has just displayed, but shall do my very best.

A member interjected.

Hon SANDRA CARR: Yes, that is true. Hopefully my content might be more relatable to the demographic in the room.

I begin by acknowledging what the Leader of the House said in that many members across the floor seemed to be crying out that the sky would fall after our excellent handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the current circumstances that does not appear to be the case, particularly after the weekend just past when Hon Kyle McGinn was at the UFC event and I was seated and bopping away at the Red Hot Chili Peppers concert. The night before I also had the opportunity to sit outdoors in our beautiful Whadjuk Noongar country in Kings Park to hear rock legend Sting perform. There was something on offer for everyone that weekend in Perth. It really was a great indictment of the work done to attract world-class acts to our state.

In December last year, the Western Australian domestic spend topped \$1 billion. We have indeed bounced back, and that extends to both regional and metropolitan WA. In November last year, Lonely Planet—members might have heard of that little book that is sort of well known around the globe—named Western Australia in the top 30 travel destinations for 2023. It is no small feat to have our state, which we often claim is unnoticed and overlooked across the globe, recognised by Lonely Planet. It noted the unique destinations that we offer including our wide-open spaces and our strong connection to Aboriginal culture, and there has indeed been a proliferation and a great movement to Aboriginal cultural tourism, which is something this state can celebrate. It referred to our amazing reefs, beaches, gorges, lakes and monoliths. We have it all here in Western Australia. The McGowan government is doing an excellent job in promoting that, and tourists are returning in droves. Tourist numbers have reached pre-pandemic figures, and I feel fairly confident to predict that we will go beyond those numbers in 2023. International students are also returning and exceeding pre-COVID numbers, which is an exciting development for WA. We are indeed safe and strong, as we have set out to achieve, and the rest of the world is noticing and they want to be here, which is fantastic for us.

The Walking on a Dream campaign recently launched by Minister Cook is touching the world and capturing the hearts and minds of people, too, I might add. I happen to have a daughter who lives in London who saw a whale shark floating across what almost seemed like the sky on one of those beautiful big digital billboards. She said that people were stopping to look and she felt really excited to see people notice the tourism opportunity in Western Australia. If anyone has been to central London, they will know that it is full of tourists looking for their next travel opportunity. It is an excellent campaign that was launched by Minister Cook.

Hon Klara Andric; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dan Caddy; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Sandra Carr

I will add one more event to the list of fantastic events coming up this year that were raised by the Leader of the House. In April this year, Perth will be hosting the World Transplant Games, which is another exciting addition to events held here. It is an event worth noticing and celebrating because we know that organ donors and their recipients form a significant and important part of the work that we do as a country and as a government. I have a cousin who had a double lung transplant just over 10 years ago now. She has told me about the time she spent waiting for that organ transplant. The gratitude that she feels to the donor and their family is something that never leaves her. For Perth to host the World Transplant Games is a fantastic way to not only honour and show our gratitude for that group of people, but also bring people to Western Australia.

I will mention some projects in the Agricultural Region that have been supported by the WA government. The Welcome to Gero project will benefit from \$250 000. The project will develop a new tourism and entertainment precinct in Geraldton. I believe that historically the site had been deliberately lit on fire and then it became a redundant space that was used as a car park. The member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton, is doing a fantastic job for Geraldton and the midwest region by advocating for tourism and a whole range of projects that are attracting both large and small business. It has been a great way to improve the tourism offerings in the region. The Shore Leave Festival is coming up in April this year in Geraldton and the midwest region. It is another fantastic tourism event that has been strongly advocated for by the member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton, and supported by local government.

Another event that was recently added to the calendar in the midwest region is the Backroads Fields of Gold Event—a bit of a Sting theme is emerging here. It is a gravel bike event in the Chapman Valley in which riders ride through the beautiful fields of gold canola while in full bloom, and it happens at the start of the wildflower season as well. Some fantastic events are emerging in that region. Along that trail in Nanson is the Chapman Valley Historical Society Heritage Centre, one of our fulfilled election commitments that has provided a new structure to house the display. We can see the impact of the McGowan government's spending that is enhancing all tourism opportunities across the state and throughout the regions north and south of Perth.

Another exciting development that the government has invested in through Tourism Western Australia is astrotourism. Astrotourism Western Australia is supported by the Western Australian government and the Mid West Development Commission. Astrotourism WA is really embracing our areas of low-level radio interference and dark skies by offering astrotourism events that also embody some of the Aboriginal stories about how they have always used the night sky to navigate. Yallallie Downs in the Shire of Dandaragan is run by Kevin Barron. It has some astrotourism events in development that will really enhance our tourism offerings and hark back to what the Lonely Planet was saying about the importance of cultural tourism.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.