

VISITOR CENTRES

**346. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Tourism:**

Can the minister clarify which, if any, visitor centres in the golden outback and south west regions are to be closed by the government?

**Ms S.M. McHALE replied:**

I thank the member for his question. There are 101 visitor centres throughout this wonderful state. They are funded through local government, their membership base and operational income generated through merchandise sales. The government has just committed \$3.7 million to supporting and encouraging visitor centres. They are the front line of our tourism industry, and they are really important. I was therefore very amused to read the opposition's comments that the government is actually closing a number of visitor centres in the wheatbelt, goldfields and south west. A number of visitor centres have contacted my office to ask what is meant by the comments. They felt quite helpless as a result of the shameful propaganda put out by the opposition. Although we were very bemused, the visitor centres, run by very hardworking people, were very upset with the misinformation peddled by the opposition. Visitor centres are not government organisations; they are very capably managed by local government and their membership base. The government sees them as very important and has committed \$3.7 million to increase their capacity to play that front-line role. The government does not intend to close one visitor centre. I make that perfectly clear.

The second piece of misinformation that the opposition came out with was targeted at the membership of the Western Australian Tourism Commission; it said that there had been a shock resignation of five members. I know it is a hard thing to ask, but it would be worthwhile if the opposition checked its facts before trying to whip up a story that is not there. The terms of six members of the commission have expired, and I will be announcing a new commission next week. It will have very strong representation from industry, and will be very exciting. I know that the industry will be absolutely delighted with the strong commission to be announced next week. I cannot help but use this opportunity to once again reinforce how the tourism budget has grown under the Labor government. In 2001, the budget for tourism was \$30 million. In 2006-07, the budget is \$50 million.