

KALBARRI AIRPORT, LICENCE FOR SCHEDULED FLIGHTS

1188. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development:

I understand that two airlines have sought approval for the use of the airport at Kalbarri. Will the minister seek immediate approval for a licence for scheduled flights through that airport?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

The licensing of airlines is not my responsibility, but I do have responsibility for regional development, which I take seriously. As a result, I have thrown myself into the discussions on aviation policy, along with my colleagues the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, the Minister for Tourism, who has been assisted in this exercise by Hon Ken Travers, other regional ministers and the Premier. We will have a meeting on aviation policy issues later this afternoon. In reference to aviation policy, the Government has the task of looking at how deregulation has not worked to the advantage of this State. We need look no further than the current comments of the Leader of the Opposition and his critique of the way deregulation has affected regional Western Australia. Previous debates in this Chamber have shown some commonality of view between the Leader of the Opposition and the emerging policy options that are developing now within government; that is, an open skies policy will not necessarily deliver the best results. There may be ways of, for instance, triangulating Kalbarri with routes within the Gascoyne, which would ensure the maximum advantage for all of those ports, including Kalbarri, Monkey Mia, Carnarvon and Exmouth, because that is an area of the State that everyone knows is yet to meet its potential. It is clearly one of the great jewels of that area of Western Australia, and the missing ingredient is aviation. The task is getting that policy setting right so that that part of the State gets sustainable aviation services, not simply competitors that might drive one another into the ground and then leave the tourism industry and local residents without an ongoing service. Getting this right is no small task; there is no magic bullet to it. There is an element of trial and error about some of it. Regrettably, there has been error in the delivery of aviation services over the past decade and a half. We need a policy setting that works for the interests of Western Australia.