

KARIJINI NATIONAL PARK

Grievance

MR K.J.J. MICHEL (Pilbara) [9.52 am]: My grievance today to the Minister for Environment is about the road and lookout upgrades to Karijini National Park. As the member for Pilbara, I see the high traffic of visitors that visit our Pilbara towns as well as visiting Karijini National Park along the way. Karijini National Park is a popular tourist destination when visiting the Pilbara, attracting visitors from all over Western Australia and beyond. Karijini's breathtaking gorges, towering cliffs, rich native fauna and flora and unique natural landscapes are worth protecting and deserve our attention and investment.

In 2022 alone, Karijini National Park welcomed an impressive 650 000 visitors, the majority of whom were first-time tourists and families. Karijini National Park is one of WA's most internationally recognised destinations. Karijini is a place of deep cultural importance to the local Indigenous communities, home of the Banyjima, Kurrama and Innawonga people. Karijini is rich with ancient stories and traditions and its very existence is a reminder of the lasting connection between land and its traditional owners.

Since becoming the member for Pilbara in 2017, and as a long-term residence of Karratha since 2002, I have had the privilege of witnessing the yearly influx of tourists to our beautiful region with Karijini National Park remaining a beloved destination among both locals and many members of Parliament, including me. However, the growing number of visitors, particularly those travelling with caravans and heavy vehicles, has taken a toll on the region's roads, making accessing some of the national parks impossible. Over the past couple of years, weather conditions have substantially deteriorated road quality, resulting in dangerous cracks and potholes that risk the safety of both tourists and local visitors. This is a pressing concern among locals in my electorate as well as travellers from the metropolitan and Kimberley areas. Could the minister for the benefit of this house and Pilbara residents outline how this government is investing in roads and lookout upgrades at Karijini National Park?

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldy — Minister for Environment) [9.54 am]: I thank the member for the Kimberley.

Ms D.G. D'Anna: Pilbara.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sorry, Pilbara!

This is one that is close to my heart as well having taken my children there. Before the advent of COVID, we got away and hit the road. I have taken my children to other mainstream holiday destinations, but they thought Karijini was amazing. They had the best holiday. We borrowed a friend's pop-up and took the Prado. They still talk about going up to Karijini as their favourite holiday. I acknowledge the member for Pilbara for his great interest and advocacy for his electorate and encouraging tourism and indeed safer roads in this case.

I agree with the member that enhancing the park's infrastructure will provide greater access to the Pilbara and ensure the region and the state remains a top tourism destination and continues to grow. As I said, having travelled across a range of national parks, many with unsealed roads, I know that the nature of this travel sometimes makes it daunting for a lot of visitors who are not used to that sort of terrain. Karijini National Park is one of WA's most internationally recognised destinations. It is stunning. Last year, it attracted more than 650 000 visits. During the 2021 election, this government committed \$16 million to a new deck at Fern Pool and safer stairs at Hancock Gorge. In the coming year, a new lookout at Knox Gorge will be built and Weano Road, Banjima Drive north and the entry road into the Karijini Eco Resort will be sealed. The 41 kilometres of road to be sealed in Karijini will transform the national park and change the way visitors move between Weano Gorge, Karijini Eco Retreat and Dales Gorge, where we stayed.

Sealing key access roads within Karijini National Park will provide a smoother journey for park visitors, enabling cars and coaches to travel safely to and from the most popular gorge sites. The benefits of these upgrades will also extend beyond park boundaries, with flow-on effects expected for the regional economy, creating jobs and attracting more visitors and business opportunities for the local community. I am pleased to advise the member that under this government's leadership, national parks across his electorate have seen a range of upgrades over the past six years. Since 2017, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' asset investment program has invested \$4.5 million to improve visitor access and facilities in Karijini, Millstream-Chichester and Murujuga National Parks. A total of \$20.7 million has been invested through the government's infrastructure stimulus package, including \$1.2 million in Karijini to upgrade Dales campground—so I will have to go back and see the improvements—improve Karijini Visitors Centre, which is already amazing, and construct a new path to the Fortescue Falls lookout.

In the coming years, \$19.3 million will allow for the construction of a new access road into Murujuga National Park. This government is committed to providing \$5 million to establish two new day-use areas in Conzinc Bay in Murujuga National Park. That is a big ambitious step forward for the Murujuga Aboriginal community, as the

member knows, and their aspirations to set up their own on entrepreneurial tourism businesses and increase visitation and cultural appreciation of that very important part of the world.

A further \$6.8 million is being invested to establish a DBCA regional office and associated infrastructure and services in Karratha. We know the role of DBCA and the workload continues to grow, as it should, in a very environmentally significant part of our state, so we are providing a good base camp in beautiful Karratha for our officers to operate from. In total, the McGowan and Cook governments have invested a significant amount, \$53 million, to improve visitor access in Karijini, Millstream–Chichester and Murujuga National Parks in the Pilbara region. I thank the member for Pilbara for his grievance and I commit to continuing to see that Labor will protect and invest in our national parks in his electorate.