

CABLE BEACH - CAMEL TOURISM OPERATORS

Motion

MS K. HODSON-THOMAS (Carine) [4.13 pm]: I move -

That this house calls on the government to bring to a speedy resolution the unfair situation on Cable Beach imposed upon camel tourism operators resulting from an anticompetitive tender process.

This motion relates to a tender process for camel operations in Broome. For the benefit of members, I will outline the process as best I understand it. I met with the unsuccessful camel operators when I was in Broome in July. I am not here to criticise the decision of the Shire of Broome. I can understand that it has taken professional and legal advice about the process and it believes that it has done everything according to the law. However, I still feel that there is a need to inquire into this matter because the camel operators feel particularly aggrieved because, largely, they feel that some level of competitive advantage was given to the successful proponent. Again, I am not here to criticise the Broome council. I have written to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, the Minister for Tourism and the Treasurer outlining my concerns. For the benefit of the house and to give a lightness to the debate, I rode a camel while I was in Broome, which, for the benefit of the Treasurer, I paid for out of my pocket and not out of any allowance. I was there on a break. I have a postcard of the camels in Broome which I show to the house.

Mr T. Buswell: Which one is the camel.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The member asks which one is the camel! It is a photo of me riding Sheba in July 2006. I have another postcard of a group of us. This is the best way to see a sunset in Broome; it is absolutely fantastic. It is no wonder that it is a huge attraction to Broome, which is why I have come into this place to talk about the plight of these camel operators. When I refer to the camel operators, I will be referring to two of the camel operators, Alison Bird who has been running Broome Camel Safaris, and Abdul Casley, who operates Ships of the Desert. Both of these people are very highly regarded in Broome. Abdul has been running his operation for 25 years. In fact, he took the camels to Broome. He walked from Alice Springs to Broome with his camels and he set up a business operation that is now an iconic business in Broome. People travel from all over the world to enjoy the experience. Alison is a very interesting woman. It was Alison's organisation that I chose to take my camel ride with. Alison has spent more than 22 years being involved with camels. She treats them as though they are her children and I have a real respect and admiration for people who love their animals and treat them fairly. She spent about seven years living in the bush with her camels. She brought her business to Broome 15 years ago. These people created a tourism business in Broome and because of that, I bring their plight to the attention of the Parliament.

I referred this matter to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, because I believe the tendering system was anticompetitive and may have been a breach of the Trade Practices Act. The ACCC has serious concerns about local governments being protected under section 2D of the act, but has no power to address this situation. I have talked about the operators. I understand the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Jon Ford, has considered the issues, for which I am very grateful. I am asking the government to facilitate a speedy resolution of the situation to remove the anxiety and uncertainty of the operators of the local tourism industry in Broome. These people will cease operating in January, just like that - with a stroke of a brush. I know that they understood the tender process, but they all had a camel licence. I understand that the four camel licences in Broome have all been awarded to one successful tenderer. There have been some suggestions and allegations that he had a competitive edge. That is why there is a need to inquire into and investigate the matter to ensure that that is not the case, to make certain that the shire has done everything according to the law, to reassess this matter and to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen again. I am certainly anti monopolies. Members on this side of the house believe in competition, which provides a healthy environment in which to operate. The other chap is obviously a very capable business operator. He saw an opportunity and decided that he would go in hard and do everything in his power to win all those licences. It has been suggested that he had some kind of competitive edge.

I register my disappointment with the Minister for Tourism. I think this is a significant issue. The Minister for Tourism should be acting to ensure that those business interests in Broome are looked after. The industry is certainly going backwards. When I talked to stakeholders there, they expressed major concerns about tourism in this state. Domestic and international tourist numbers are down. It does not matter what we say about world events, that should not be the case and the tourism industry should not be going backwards. This is an important issue in the minister's portfolio. I am looking to the Minister for Tourism -

Mr R.F. Johnson: Is she not the Minister for Small Business as well?

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No, but the Minister for Small Business should probably be present.

Mr R.F. Johnson: He should be because we are talking about small business. The matter goes across the two portfolios of tourism and small business.

Ms S.M. McHale: And local government.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: It goes across all three portfolios.

Mr R.F. Johnson: The member for Peel would make a very important contribution.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Where is the member for Peel?

Mr R.C. Kucera: He is at a conference in Brisbane.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I understand that the Minister for Tourism recently announced a review of nature-based tourism, which would cover the camel operators of Broome. I am curious about why the minister will not accept any public submissions on the issue.

Ms S.M. McHale: I understand that queries should be directed to the Minister for the Environment.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: During a recent grievance debate in the chamber I raised the point that we had initiated the Western Australian Tourism Forum to allow stakeholders in the industry to provide us with information and to answer a series of questions about issues relating to tourism, which we posed because they felt that they were not being listened to. It is interesting to look at some of the comments we have received on this issue from people in the Broome area. A gallery owner in Broome wrote -

I am disheartened by the callous lack of regard by the State Government on the issue of the monopoly regarding camel tours in this town which has been supported by our Shire Council. Due to a 'loophole' in the tender process. Several operators will find themselves out of business at the end of this year while one tour operator will retain a monopoly in the town. One of those operators who are victim in this decision is the very person who bought camels to Broome in the first place 20 odd years ago. At the end of the year, he and two other operators will be joining the 'dole' queue. While one operator who enjoys the support of the local council will operate a monopoly with all of its associated problem's. I think the 'cold shoulder' shown by the state government on this issue proves that we now live on a society where the 'fair go' is just an old joke -

Mr R.F. Johnson: A thing of the past.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Yes. It continues -

and that the money is really the only concern over fair trading and ethical behaviour in the tourism arena. What's to stop the shire demanding a licence for only one gallery in Broome -

This person is a gallery owner in Broome -

or only one cafe!

The gallery owner has made a fair point. I want to quote from a number of other contributors, one of whom is Sharon Booth, the owner and operator of Broome Jet Ski Hire, who wrote -

It was refreshing to read your message of support in the Broome Advertiser on 27th July, regarding Camel Operators and the tender process.

As a commercial business operator on Cable Beach that was subject to the same tender process as the Camel Operators, I am devastated by the decision by the Shire to award 1 Camel Operator all 3 licences. It could have been me in a similar situation.

The tender process was unfair from the beginning of its intervention and in fact was never a necessary introduction. Local, dedicated and professional tourist business operators were already successfully functioning on Cable Beach. All we needed to continue was a fair licensing agreement.

That is really what this issue is about; it is about providing a fairer licensing agreement. As much as I do not want to attack the shire, I found in my discussions with people there that there is a move on the part of some people on the shire council to get rid of the camels. In many cases that is what this is about; it is an attempt to ensure that those camels will no longer be allowed to be there. For whatever reason those councillors might have that view, I cannot begin to understand it. I undertook a wonderful journey with mums, dads, children, grandparents and other tourists on those camels. It is a beautiful way to see the moonlight.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I have been on a camel.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Has the member?

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Mr R.F. Johnson: Absolutely. It was a grumpy old thing but it was quite an enjoyable ride. It reminded me of some members opposite.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The issue is about a fair licensing agreement. Sharon Booth, the owner-operator of Jet Ski Hire in Broome, has certainly raised it. She went on to write -

Previously we were operating on 1 year licenses without guarantee of further renewal. No-one can operate a sustainable business on those terms let alone offer a quality tourist experience in a unique town like Broome.

Broome is a unique place. We should be encouraging growth there. When I was there I heard of the accommodation boom in Broome, with a thousand accommodation beds being booked. With that has come the problem of ensuring that employees are available to support tourism.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I have always said that Broome has so much potential that it could take many of the visitors who would normally go to Bali. Broome could provide accommodation cheaper than it can at the moment if it had the extra beds that are needed, which it is in dire need of. A couple of years ago, in the months of July and August people could not hire a car because they had all been hired out. The hotels were all full. People would love to go there. We could get Western Australians to go to Broome rather than Bali. It is a question of cost and competition. I totally support what the member says about camels, because I think they are a great attraction. As with any business, it needs competition. I believe that competition among camel owners was a good thing for the tourists. I am not quite sure about the Broome council; I cannot see the logic behind what it has done.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: It is more about the economic benefit that the council is getting, which is another issue, and that is why this matter needs to be inquired into. Was this person given some kind of competitive edge over the other proponents? The member for Hillarys makes some very valid points. Tourism in this state really needs to grow. We need to be ensuring that we provide an environment in which it can grow. The member for Hillarys has also made some interesting points about making Broome a more affordable destination for Western Australians. Domestic tourist numbers are down because people choose to travel out of the country. The point is similar to the one made in the debate I had on Rottnest Island with the Minister for Tourism: Western Australians have this great location in their backyard, but it is slowly becoming unaffordable for families. Where do they choose to go? They choose to go to Bali.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Because it is cheaper.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: Yes, it is cheaper. I spoke to someone on Monday evening who told me that he was about to travel overseas because he needed a break. I asked him where he was going and he told me that he was going to Bali. I could not help myself. I had to ask him why he would go to Bali when we have Broome in our backyard. His answer was that it is cheaper. How do we create an environment that ensures that we encourage domestic tourism in our own state? The north west is a beautiful area. Madam Acting Speaker (Mrs J. Hughes), you know as well as I do what a great place the north west is. We travelled in the north west recently for a standing committee inquiry.

Mr P.D. Omodei: A junket!

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I did not acknowledge that interjection! The standing committee inquiry into fire and emergency services legislation is very important. We travelled to interesting places such as Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Broome has a runway that will take jumbos. International visitors have arrived at Broome airport. In the past it has had to send customs and immigration officers to Broome to facilitate international tourists. We could accommodate far more tourists if the government were prepared to do more in the tourism portfolio for people visiting Broome, but it sits on its hands as usual and does nothing.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: It is interesting that the member should make those comments. Broome does have an international airport. Members can see how passionate the member for Hillarys is about the tourism portfolio, as am I and as are other members on this side of the chamber. The member for Cottesloe was a tourism minister for a brief time, and I have been told that he was a fantastic tourism minister.

Ms S.M. McHale: It was the member who said that!

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: No, he did not tell me.

Several members interjected.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: To return to the issue of the camel operators and the beautiful camels -

Mr R.F. Johnson: I would not say "beautiful".

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I think camels are very interesting animals.

Mr T. Buswell: It depends whether you're at the front or the back of the queue!

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: For the person sitting on the back, they are very interesting animals.

Mr G. Snook: They are an animal designed by a committee.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I return to the issue of the camel operators, and particularly Sharon Booth, the owner-operator of Broome Jet Ski Hire. She writes -

Broome is and should remain a town of diversity. This Shire has been demonstrating its support toward corporate and multi-national bodies who are prepared to 'pay for a piece of Broome'. It is selling this town to people for a price that seems to benefit only the upper class. In return, their promises of making Broome a better place to live for the general public is a large shortfall of anyone's expectations. This is evident in the decision to grant a monopoly licence to one operator rather than support a diverse and professional field of dedicated operators with proven track records.

That is quite true. As I said, Abdul Casley brought camels to Broome 25 years ago. He is an interesting person, as is Alison Bird. They are salt of the earth Australians. I am standing in this place because I believe they should be given a fair go. L. Gayfer wrote -

How on earth was this allowed to occur?

You really have to question who these people are at Broome Shire who allowed this clearly flawed tender process to take place . . .

Everyone knows that competition is GOOD, and that to hand one operator a monopoly is NOT!

During my frequent visits to Broome throughout the past 15 years I have observed all the camel ride businesses operating side by side along Cable Beach -

That is the important point. They operate side by side, they keep each other honest and there is competition. It continues -

a Broome institution and a "must do" for tourists, with all being fully utilised during the peak tourist season, and all bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience to the adventure. Why could this not have continued?

It goes on to say more. An e-mail from Mr Andrew Woodcock refers to competitive advantage and public interest. It states -

I ask the government

How does the Government allow the Shire of Broome to construct a Tender process that facilitates the creation of a monopoly?

Is there evidence of gross incompetence by the Shire of Broome in constructing a flawed tender process? If so what does the government intend to do about this?

How is the Government ensuring that the consumer is not disadvantaged by the creation of this monopoly?

How is the Government ensuring that the tourist public is not exploited by the lack of competition in this industry as it relates to price, quality and service?

How does the Shire's decision fit in with a longer term strategy to harness the tourist appeal of WA for long term community benefits?

How does the government intend to address this concern based on the weight of public interest?

I call on the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, the Minister for Tourism and the Treasurer to look at the issue and to ensure that the tender process was carried out according to the law, as the council has intimated, and that these business operators are given a fair go.

Mr R.F. Johnson: What are they going to do with the camels if they are not given a fair go? What are these good tourism operators going to do with their camels if they cannot earn a living by giving rides to children and tourists?

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: They are very good points, member for Hillarys. They will have to find alternative places to run the camels.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 30 August 2006]

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Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Mr R.F. Johnson: However, there is nowhere else to go. They are not going to bring them down to the Swan River and run them along Riverside Drive. Broome is about the only place that is suitable for the camel rides. The climate is conducive to camel rides for tourists. The sunset rides are beautiful. It concerns me what will happen to the camels when the camel ride operators are told that they can no longer operate along the Broome coast.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Member for Carine, I don't know whether you agreed to this duet with the member for Hillarys, but I think you should give your speech and allow him to give his.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I am sure that the member for Hillarys would like to give a speech. He has an affinity with camels, as do I!

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, it is the operators I have an affinity with. The tourism minister should be doing everything in her power to assist these businesspeople, and if they are being treated unfairly by the Broome council, that is it.

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: The member is trying to assist me, but he is quite able to make his own speech, as am I. This is an important issue. I am very passionate about the issue. I was having a break in Broome - at least I thought I was - when I caught up with the camel tour operators. I was amazed at their commitment and dedication. It is a wonderful operation in Broome; they work in harmony with one another. It is a fantastic opportunity and I highly recommend that all members go on a camel ride. I think I paid \$45 for my ride, and the operators value add with the wonderful photographs and postcards that my colleague the member for Vasse is holding up. I encourage the Minister for Tourism and the Treasurer, given that he has responsibility for competition policy in this state, to inquire into the issue and ensure that there is a speedy resolution. As the member for Hillarys has pointed out, these people have invested huge sums of money in the animals and the business interest as well as time. They have invested years and enormous sums of money. The welfare and care of the animals is very important as well. What will happen to their camels? Where will they go? Are they to be sold to the other operator?

When I heard of this situation it made me think that the operators come from our philosophical base. We believe in free enterprise and that competition is healthy. I was very concerned that, suddenly, with the stroke of a pen, the operators have been told that they can no longer operate. There was no discussion of compensation. My personal view is that a tender process is the right way to go. Were they all given the right information? Was the proponent who won the licence given the competitive advantage of knowing that he could tender for all the licences? The other operators were not told that. That point needs to be made as well. Was the proponent who won the tender given an unfair advantage by being told that all the licences could be tendered for? We must ensure that everybody is given the same information and that they are on a level playing field. I do not believe that this has been the case, certainly not from the comments that have been provided to me.

I look forward to hearing the comments of the Minister for Tourism on this matter. I hope that the Treasurer may also make some comments. I am not sure whether the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development has provided any further details to members in the upper house. I understand Hon Shelley Archer has stated that she will be pursuing this matter in the other place. I am interested to read the report of that discussion. I know that other colleagues on this side of the house want to speak about the camel operators who operate in Broome, and who are part and parcel of that great place that I, for one, certainly enjoy visiting.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.43 pm]: I will be brief and to the point.

A member: I thought you were a camel hunter and not a camel rider!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There are many in the desert that make good fur skins for the fur trade in China.

Due to the problems outlined, I also visited Cable Beach at Broome and had a look. I understood that it was the nude side of the beach so I got a new pair of togs - Speedos - as well as some sun cream, a hat and a towel over my shoulder. I walked to the beach and had a bit of a look around. I put the dark glasses on very quickly. I then decided to lie down on the beach and was woken up by a ranger who thought that I was a beached whale. He tried to roll me into the water! I went a bit further down and, after passing many people who should have been covered up, I saw a wonderful creature. I do not understand why people think that it is a rotisserie up there. They burn one side, roll over, and burn the other side. Some of them were about this round and some were bigger than that. They should probably be covered up for the rest of their lives. A rule should be made for the beach that once a person reaches 80 years of age, he should be covered up forever. It was certainly an eye-opener. As I walked down the beach a bit further, I saw a wonderful creature. She had painted toenails and a lovely body. The only problem was her bad habit of spitting! Of course, it was a camel. The camels add magnificently to the beach. However, there are problems.

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Being quite serious, I have been briefed by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development on this issue. As members will be aware, the way in which the Shire of Broome has handled the issues pertaining to the treatment of Cable Beach camel operators -

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: I do not mean to be rude. Is the member representing the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes, as the parliamentary secretary.

Mr T. Buswell: You'll have to do a good job if you want to justify the extra money.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The minus what?

The handling of this issue has certainly come in for some criticism from the general public and the operators. There have been a few marches and protests about what has been going on. That has been well documented in the press. The minister has taken note of that. The process undertaken by the Shire of Broome to tender out the three licences to operate camel tours on Cable Beach resulted in all three licences being awarded to one operator. We are all aware of that. I am advised by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development that a number of complex legal issues that have arisen will require resolution by the Shire of Broome. The last time I was in Broome I met with the shire president and I spoke to him about this issue. He was quite confident that things would move on and the problem would be resolved. Although local governments are autonomous, they must still abide by the law, including the Local Government Act and all legislation that regulates their activities. Having said that, both I and the minister believe that the Broome councillors have nothing but the best intentions -

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): Order! I am sorry to interrupt. Is the member the lead speaker on this? I need to know because of the time schedule.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No. The councillors at Broome have nothing but the best intentions. Although there is criticism, the general community is quite keen to work through this issue to the general satisfaction of most. As we know, in our game not everyone will be happy.

To this purpose, the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development has intervened in the matter. In July the minister received correspondence from a number of concerned residents of Broome about the activities of the shire in relation to camel tourism operators. Anyone with any connection to the region will be aware of the angst that has been caused in the community. The member for Kimberley was among those who raised concerns, especially with our group and the shire. The minister referred this matter to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development for advice on the concerns raised. Since then a number of issues have been referred to the State Solicitor's Office for legal advice about a number of complex legal issues concerning the way the Shire of Broome has conducted itself. At issue is the shire's jurisdiction over Cable Beach itself - that has been well reported in the press - and its powers under the Local Government Act to tender a licence for far more than the cost of providing that licence. Since receiving legal advice, the minister and the Director General of the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, Ms Cheryl Gwilliam, have met with shire representatives including the shire president, Councillor Graeme Campbell, to discuss the minister's concerns as well as the concerns of the community. The minister wrote to the shire on 14 August 2006 to formally raise with the shire the legal problems that appear to exist with the entire process. The minister has also given an assurance that he will work with the Shire of Broome to help it overcome these problems. The member for Carine will be interested to know that the minister is keen to resolve the dispute.

The minister received the shire's response on 28 August 2006. As a result of that response, the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development is awaiting further legal advice. I can guarantee that he will take the appropriate action. The member for Carine may think that she has a quick fix for this problem, but I am sure that most people understand that there is no quick fix. This is an enormous legal headache that will probably create a precedent. We must be very well aware of that. I am sure that the enormous headache that the Shire of Broome has got from this was unexpected. I spoke to the shire president and he was very surprised about the windfall that the shire received from the tender documents. He was very surprised at the prices tendered. The decision made by the shire would not have appeared that difficult on the surface; however, the legal and other aspects were not taken into account. I am sure people are aware - it has also been reported in the press - that the unsuccessful operators have mounted an appeal in the State Administrative Tribunal on the process undertaken by the Shire of Broome. That is another aspect of this issue, which may have appeared simple on the surface but is actually very complex, as I have said.

I can guarantee to the house that the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development will ensure that this important issue is resolved as quickly as possible. I have outlined the briefing notes I have been given from the minister. People in Broome have been working on this issue. I have gone to Broome to have a look and to

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

speak to the shire president and residents. Members opposite have raised an issue that is of major concern. There may initially have been a bit of a knee-jerk reaction to this issue, but it has now moved into the legal arena. I am sure this matter will be resolved as quickly as possible.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [4.51 pm]: I have been encouraged to say a few words on the motion. I am happy to speak on the member for Carine's motion and to indicate my support. In my view, when the Shire of Broome sent out the tender documents for the three licences, it should have stipulated clearly that no one person or entity could submit a tender for more than one licence. I can understand why the Shire of Broome decided to use a tender process. However, I find it appalling that it failed to consider the implications of its actions and thereby created a situation in which it was open slather for one person to put in a tender for all three licences. It is against the spirit of competition, and it will not be in the interests of tourists in Broome. If the Shire of Broome had stipulated that an individual or entity could tender for only one licence, it would have received at least three tenders - or probably more. Tourists want competition. If one operator has the monopoly for the camel rides on Cable Beach, that operator will be able to charge whatever it likes. That may be the reason that operator put in the highest bid. I have ridden on the camels with some of my children and grandchildren. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience - except for when my camel got up and I was thrown forwards! Whether people are thrown forwards probably depends on whether they are sitting at the front or the back of the camel. Also, people who weigh less than me would probably find it easier to ride a camel.

As the member for Carine has said, Western Australia needs to provide attractions for tourists. Kings Park is a beautiful place. However, it does not do a great deal for tourists unless they are interested in trees and wildflowers.

Ms S.M. McHale: Kings Park is one of our major tourist attractions, and you are putting it down!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am not putting it down. I am saying that it does not have a lot to offer to people who are not specifically interested in that sort of flora. It is a beautiful place. However, a lot of tourists want more than just old-growth forests and tall trees. They want more than Kings Park. This state has an abundance of tourist attractions. However, people have to travel quite a long way to appreciate many of the attractions that we perhaps take for granted. A lot of tourists do not have the time or the finances to travel throughout this state. Our airline service is pretty atrocious at encouraging people to fly within Western Australia. The costs and timings of the flights are not conducive to encouraging Western Australians, let alone tourists, to travel often. We should be providing interconnecting flights with Asian countries so that people can come into Perth and enjoy a few days in our capital city. They can visit Kings Park. They can visit the pearl of the northern suburbs - Hillarys Marina - and go to AQWA and all the other wonderful facilities there. They can go to Yanchep or Mandurah. They can visit any of those places in a day. However, if they want to go to Broome or see the other beautiful attractions on our north west coast, it will take them longer and cost them a lot more. A lot of international tourists would be very keen to fly into Karratha, Carnarvon, Port Hedland and all points north. That is what we need. There is no train service to those towns. However, there is an air service. I know that the Speaker of this house would love to have people visit his electorate, particularly international tourists. I am sure he would make them very welcome. For the benefit of the tape, I note that the Speaker is nodding his head in agreement with what I say.

I have been to Broome a number of times. I love it up there. Broome is a beautiful place to visit. However, it has some limitations. It is a very small place, and it has a limited number of hotels and motels. Broome probably needs another 1 000 beds to cater for the busy winter period. I do not know when those extra beds will be made available. Many grey nomads go to Broome in winter to stay in the caravan parks and enjoy the attractions that Broome has to offer. Broome has only one main street. When I was last in Broome, I stayed at Cable Beach Club Resort. I had been to a meeting, and afterwards I wanted to have something to eat in a decent restaurant in town. However, only one restaurant was open.

Mr M.P. Murray: Was that before the war or after the war?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It was before the Crimean war but after the Boer war!

Mr M. McGowan: Your knowledge of history is not very good!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am only kidding! However, what I am saying is true. Only one restaurant was open. Broome is a very quaint place in many respects. Of course, the pearling industry is an attraction to tourists, not just to buy pearls, but also to see how they are harvested and treated, and to see the final result in fantastic shops like Linneys.

Mr M.P. Murray: You would have to agree they have done a magnificent job in making sure the style of the buildings is in keeping with their history.

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Absolutely. They should continue to do that. There is nothing wrong with building more infrastructure that is in keeping with the natural heritage values of Broome. That is very important. What we do not want in Broome is 28-storey skyscrapers. That would detract from Broome. However, there is no need for that, because there is a lot of land in Broome. The runway at the airport is capable of taking jumbo jets. People were travelling from I think Singapore or Malaysia to Broome on package holidays. My good friend Hon Simon O'Brien tells me that when he was a customs officer they used to send people to Broome to deal with the international tourists who were coming into Broome Airport. When I first went to Broome many years ago I found it most amusing to see the duty free shop up there. It is a very quaint shop. There is hardly any point in having a duty free shop in Broome these days, because very few international tourists are coming to Broome. I suppose that is what the shop was called when international tourists were coming to Broome, and they decided to keep the name partly for amusement and partly to encourage people to buy things there.

The member for Carine was right in what she said about the camels. This debate is about the camel facilities in Broome. I have been a businessman for nearly all my life, and I have always believed in competition. I have always been opposed to the big firms - the monopolies - being able to dictate prices and which facilities they are prepared to offer the public. I believe that the risk being run in Broome is that having only one operator will have a detrimental effect on the tourism market. It would be much better to have at least three operators so that there is true competition. I want to see true competition. I would not want to see price fixing between the three of them, so that they all charge the same price, because that is not competition. They could do other things to add to their competitive edge; they could have something over and above just the camel ride along the beach.

I was very happy when I had the shadow portfolio of tourism. I have always believed that it is one of the major economic portfolios in this state. Tourism is worth about \$5 billion a year in revenue to this state. It represents something like 70 000 jobs in this state. It should be considered a major portfolio. Governments of all persuasions never took it seriously enough in the past. It should be taken seriously now. We started to. A couple of years ago when I was asked to take on the shadow tourism portfolio responsibilities, I was very happy to do so, because it involves many small businesses. Small business is the backbone of this state and of this country. It makes the difference. Small businesses are the biggest employers collectively in this country. We should be doing everything we can to assist small business, in particular when it is involved in the tourism industry. It must be assisted. We must help small business as much as we can, because in that way there will be more jobs, more revenue, and more taxes paid to the government, whichever government may be in office, and that means there will be more money to spend on areas such as health, education, and law and order. If the government does not take this portfolio seriously, it runs the risk of diminishing the number of tourists who want to come to Western Australia and therefore the number of tourist dollars spent in not only Perth, but also the whole of Western Australia. We should do everything we can to assist small business.

Let us have proper competition. Let us ensure that the tender process was a justifiable and equitable process. If it was not, the state government has a duty to rectify the situation. I suggest that the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development is probably the most appropriate minister to deal with that, or the minister who is responsible for State Supply Commission tenders and contracts throughout this state, who I think is the Treasurer these days. However, the Minister for Tourism could have a massive input into this, if she really wants to get involved and do the very best she can for the tourism industry and the tourism operators, who I believe do a fantastic job in Western Australia, against all the odds of a government that has never really been committed to tourism. The government has spent some money on tourism in the past couple of years, but for years it was never committed to tourism. In fact, one year it spent less than a million dollars on destination marketing. These are some of the complaints that I have raised many times. The minister needs to be serious about this issue, and she needs to do everything she can -

Ms S.M. McHale: I am very serious.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, she is not. That is the trouble. She is not serious enough. I am trying to urge her to get serious, do her job and assist the people in the tourism industry, because without them we will have problems. The minister should go up to Broome, kiss a camel and get things right in Broome so that the camel operators get a fair deal and the tourists get a fair deal.

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [5.05 pm]: It is not my intention to take a lot of time or to talk about my history of dealing with camels or camelids in the veterinary field.

A member interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I have found that camels are quite cantankerous animals to work on. They make it quite difficult for those who are obliged to deal with their health issues. People tend to think of well-trained camels as being very soft and gentle, but an angry camel is quite dangerous.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: This was your prerequisite training to become a member of the Liberal Party, was it?

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Being a vet and dealing with animals is obviously a natural kind of training for coming into this place and dealing with members of the current government.

Mr J.C. Kobelke interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Dealing with camels is probably very good training for dealing with the government, I suspect.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Because they are both grumpy.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: They are both grumpy, that is right, and the noise they make is about the same. The noise of a bull camel, in particular, is not very pleasant. It makes a terrible noise. Camels are quite difficult to work on. I will not go into too much detail about camels. However, as a veterinarian, I worked on a number of camels. They are not designed for the sorts of pasture that they feed on in the south-west corner of the state. They tend to be designed to feed on rough foods. Of course, roughage is a very important part of their diet, and it is important for them to browse. They tend to be taken to the south-west corner and put on wonderful lush paddocks, but they struggle. People there lose camels through parasite burdens that they pick up from ruminating. Broome is obviously a much better place for camels, I suspect, than the south-west corner.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: How do you give them a rectal examination?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: A person stands on something tall.

I understand the Minister for Tourism will give the main response to this debate.

Ms S.M. McHale: Yes, I will.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It is not my intention to take a lot of time and jump up and down. However, I would like the minister to address, if she can, some of the questions concerning the history of this incident. Moving away from the biology of camels to the actual issue at hand, can the minister give us an indication of why, for example, there are three licences in Broome for camel operators? The local government is obviously involving itself in a business decision. It is almost anticompetitive by nature to license these operators. In ecotourism, for example, there is a reason that a licence is attached to something. It is because people want to minimise damage and to control what is happening. They do not want to overburden the environment. That happens in ecotourism all over the state, and that is quite reasonable. However, can the minister give us an indication of the concerns that have led to the camel ride operators being required to have a licence? Following on from that, what component of the licence that is applied by the Shire of Broome goes into the management of whatever it is that requires licensing? We probably do not want a thousand camels walking up and down Cable Beach, for example. Camels are a feral species. They do damage. It is one of the species that is listed. We know that generally the government is not interested in feral species. It is one of the sore points that we will no doubt hammer it on over the next couple of years.

Mr R.F. Johnson: It has a few among its ranks.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Yes. I suspect that the lack of activity on ferals is self-preservation on the part of the Labor Party, member for Hillarys. On a serious note, camels have an impact. The issue is about licensing. We are dealing with competitive behaviour. What is the impact that this activity is having that requires a licence to be managed? Is it purely a matter of competition? That is, is the number of licences restricted to make the businesses that hold those licences more financially viable? Will the minister give us an indication of the history of how this came about? I understand that for some time three camel licences operated in Broome. Have these licences been issued on a historical basis? Will the minister explain the reasons for the licences? Is it because of the insurance capability of the Shire of Broome? Is the shire required to carry insurance to cover any damage done by the camels to tourists? I suspect that the camel operators will be required to carry public liability insurance. The camels are not running around Broome. They are housed day and night. What damage are these camels causing to require a licensing component? Camels are a ruminant animal and they produce, dare I say it, a lot of poo.

Ms S.E. Walker: It is animal dung.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I thank the member for Nedlands. I will use the word “dung”. We do not want that lying on the Broome beach. It has to be picked up. Is that why the camel industry is licensed; and that provides the opportunity for the system to be corrupt? I am not saying that it is bad. However, I ask the minister to explain the reason that the Broome council will allocate all three licences to one operator. That is anticompetitive behaviour. If the camels are important to the tourism industry, and I presume they are - tourist figures around Western Australia have dropped and the member for Carine will probably be able to tell me whether tourist numbers are up in Broome. Tourist numbers in the north of Western Australia are generally down. Are camels a

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

part of maintaining tourism activity in Broome? If so, would more licences for more camel activity be of benefit? Who is looking at the requirements and undertaking the work to determine what is an appropriate number? Does the government have any idea what will be the best outcome for the number of licences, camels and operators? Does the Shire of Broome have any idea? I am criticising not only the government, but also the Broome council, which allocates the licence. It is not a state government licence. The member for Collie-Wellington will probably tell me, but my understanding is that the licensing system has nothing to do with the state. The camel industry does not need an environmental licence or a feral animal licence. I understand the licence fee is in the order of \$1 million a year. Is that a correct estimate?

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas: It is \$1 million over five years.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I thank the member for Carine. I did not expect members of the government to know the answer. The member for Carine had the answer at her fingertips and I should have asked her the question in the first place. If we are advised of the reason for the licences and what the money will be spent on, we will be in a position to determine why these licences have been awarded to the same person, which is remarkably dangerous.

Mr M.P. Murray: I am sure a lot of that information is available. I was told that 23 000 people arrived in Broome by plane in June. How do we work that out - five people per camel?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: A licensing system exists and there should be some indication of how many camels are required. If Tourism WA and the minister were on top of the game they would have an indication of the impact of camels on tourism in Broome. Perhaps the minister may give us an indication in that regard. It is an important part of the planning process. Surely the member for Collie-Wellington is not telling the opposition that there is a licensing system for camels in Broome, but the government has no idea of the impact of camels on the tourism industry. That information should be available. If it is not, it is a terrible indictment on whoever is in charge of the process. If the minister can give some history behind the licensing system, explain what that system sets out to achieve and where the money goes, we can then debate the issue of why the licences have been awarded to one person, which is a dangerous situation.

MR T. BUSWELL (Vasse - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.15 pm]: I will make a few brief comments in support of the motion put to the house by the member for Carine, which reads -

That this House calls on the Government to bring to a speedy resolution the unfair situation on Cable Beach imposed upon camel tourism operators resulting from an anticompetitive tender process.

It is not fair of the member for Collie-Wellington to say that in moving this motion the member for Carine is proposing a quick fix; she is asking for a quick resolution. I did not hear her mention "quick fix". I reject that statement and applaud the member for Carine for bringing this matter to the house.

My comments are based on my experience as a tourism operator, and with the Shire of Busselton as a regulator of tourism activities through local government licensing regimes, such as this one. To add to my bona fides I, too, have ridden a camel. In fact, I rode a camel around the pyramids for three packets of Marlboro cigarettes. I rode a camel along the shores of the Red Sea, at a place called Dahab.

Ms S.M. McHale interjected.

Mr T. BUSWELL: I was hanging on for grim death.

I was relaying to my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, my experience when I was driving my tour coach to Kings Canyon from Uluru. I stopped to examine something on the exterior of the coach and I was approached in a rather vigorous manner by a large bull camel. When we arrived at the Kings Canyon roadhouse, I was advised that I should not get out of the vehicle because it was mating season and the male camels would get a bit itchy. It was interesting.

I will refer to the impact of regulatory regimes in tourism. I have observed regulatory regimes in a variety of areas. One area that is of interest to me is in the coach touring industry, which is the industry in which I have some experience. The coach touring industry went from a highly prescriptive regulatory regime to a regime based more on qualitative controls of vehicles and products offered. It was very interesting for me to see the impact that competition can have in a less regulated environment, particularly the tourism market. Competition impacts upon the tourism market in a variety of ways in terms of product diversity and innovation, one's attentiveness to customer satisfaction, price competition and marketing activities.

I was interested to note that a one-way flight to Broome tomorrow can be booked for \$249. A couple of years ago a one-way flight to Broome the following day or on any day could not be booked for less than \$600. Broome was a very expensive destination. The airfares to Broome have been driven down because of the increased competition following the introduction of Virgin Blue flights. This demonstrates that competition in

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

tourism can, through price competition as well as product-based competition, have a positive impact on consumers.

It must be understood that local governments have a right and a responsibility to regulate, through licensing mechanisms, commercial activities, many of which are tourism based in areas of high interest within local government jurisdictions. This regulatory framework can apply to many activities. In this case it is camels. It could apply to jet ski operators, surf cat operators, fishing charter operators and a range of people who use the beach and foreshore areas.

It is important to understand in the context of this debate that local governments have a responsibility and a long-held practice in this state of exercising regulatory authority via the issuing of licences. However, local governments also have an obligation, as has been pointed out in this chamber today, to adhere to and abide by the conditions and spirit of the Local Government Act, particularly as it relates to tendering. I applaud the member for Carine for highlighting what she and others believe to be problems in the tendering process that was employed by the Shire of Broome in this case. It is right and fair that they be brought to the attention of the government and given due and proper consideration by the government. It may transpire that the Shire of Broome has followed the law to the nth degree. I am not suggesting that it has not for one second. It may also transpire that it has not or, alternatively, it may transpire that this example has highlighted a flaw that may need to be addressed. Therefore, the motion by the member for Carine is in no way, shape or form taking a swipe at the Shire of Broome. She is rightly highlighting a grievance which people have with the tendering process.

Mr M.P. Murray: I think both sides of the house would agree.

Mr T. BUSWELL: I know. I thought I would offer those words to the member for Collie-Wellington, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Local Government who is now not getting paid an additional \$6 900! I have made those observations in support of the arguments raised earlier by the member for Carine, because this debate may be read outside this place by people who have formed views based on what is said.

Notwithstanding that, it is also important that we acknowledge the valuable role that competition can play in the development of tourism products and the need for the regulatory frameworks that we have in this state, albeit at local government level or state government level, to enable competition to flourish wherever possible. I acknowledge that it is not always possible. However, in most instances it should be. When we impose a regulatory framework on the environment, we do a couple of things. We can stifle competition; we can create a situation in which the market power that we give to the regulated body is manifest in unusually high profits, or in a form of market domination. Market domination through regulation can be, in many instances, quite negative. Ultimately, the person who suffers is the consumer and the general tourism industry. The existence of a local government based regulatory framework is not necessarily inconsistent with competition. We acknowledge that local governments play an important role in that area.

Before I close, I cannot let the opportunity pass without making a couple of brief comments about the government's approach to tourism in general. On behalf of my leader, I had a very interesting meeting this morning with the Canadian Consul General. We had a long conversation about the tourism product now on offer on the west coast of Canada, in particular, and the boom that has occurred there. I asked him what his perceptions were of tourism in Australia. He said that it seemed to him that Queensland had stolen the march on the rest of Australia from a tourism perspective. That is a long historical legacy. The interesting thing when one observes Queensland's approach to tourism, notwithstanding product development and notwithstanding state government support, is the role that tourism has played historically and continues to play at a strategic level in Queensland's vision of where the state wants to go. Tourism in Queensland is held in incredibly high regard. It is an industry of strategic importance for the long-term future of that state. Queensland has identified for a long time that a resourced-based economy will always have its ebbs and flows and that the agricultural activity within the Queensland economy will also have its ebbs and flows, and that a flourishing, profitable, sustainable, dynamic tourism industry plays a significant role as one of the major economic pillars in the long-term future of Queensland. That has been manifest in the many examples of economic performance of Queensland, but my famous one of course is the very generous taxation regime that is by and large enjoyed in Queensland. The fact is that, in Queensland, tourism is held in high regard.

I cannot comment on the regard in which tourism was held by previous governments in this state because I was not in this place then. However, my observation in recent years has been that tourism is not given the regard that it should be given in the long-term framework or long-term planning of the future of Western Australia.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Richard Court held it in very high regard.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Yes, he did. It is not considered a core, strategic industry, the development of which is crucial to the long-term future of Western Australia. I think that is an unfortunate outcome and I speak as a

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

person who has a long history in the tourism industry. In many ways, it is my observation that the government treats tourism as a sideshow that needs to be dealt with because it is there, but it is not elevated to a particularly high level. I am not criticising the minister; I am making an observation. When I first came into the house last year, one of the first questions asked -

Ms S.M. McHale: The house has never been the same since.

Mr T. BUSWELL: My life has certainly never been the same! One of the first questions asked was of the then Minister for Tourism.

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

Mr T. BUSWELL: I always ignore what the member for Bassendean says. However, I still have my little road maps of Bassendean with his property development plans and the like! The former minister talked about the wonderful growth in tourism in Western Australia because of the growth in international tourism numbers. Because I am interested in tourism, I had a look. I discovered that Western Australia's international tourism numbers at the time had grown, as he said, by 2.9 per cent. However, the fact is that the rest of Australia's international visitor numbers had grown by a vastly superior percentage. The fact is that Western Australia's market share of international visitors to Australia had fallen. The sad fact is that it continues to fall. It has not fallen by a lot. In fact, over the past couple of years it has fallen only by 0.2 to 0.4 per cent. However, that equates to between \$37 million and \$40 million of direct consumer expenditure in the tourism industry.

What do we find has happened in domestic tourism? Domestic visitations to Western Australia have fallen, but they have fallen at almost twice the national average. Our market share in Australian domestic tourism is falling at a dramatic rate. These are the key performance measures on which we in opposition, the broader tourism industry and the people of Western Australia will judge the government. Our market share is falling. The estimated fall in domestic market share from nine per cent to 8.5 per cent is estimated to have cost us nearly \$280 million in forgone expenditure. When the figures are added together, we are heading up to almost \$350 million in direct tourism expenditure being lost. The value of that is not in the direct expenditure. Tourism expenditure has a huge multiplier effect on the state's economy. Tourism expenditure in the regions has a huge impact on those regions. I do not know what is the domestic tourism multiplier; however, I suspect it is definitely more than two and is probably heading towards three. Therefore, up to \$1 billion worth of economic activity in this state could be lost to the other states of Australia because of our unfortunate performance in tourism in recent years.

I once again lend my support to the motion moved by the member for Carine. It does not seek a quick fix; it says that this matter needs to be resolved in a speedy way. It does not criticise the Shire of Broome; it asks whether there are issues associated with the way in which this matter has been dealt with by the Shire of Broome, and those issues need to be dealt with. I see little reason - I will be interested to hear what the minister says - for the house not endorsing this motion.

MS S.M. McHALE (Kenwick - Minister for Tourism) [5.28 pm]: I will explain why we should not endorse the motion.

Amendment to Motion

Ms S.M. McHALE: I move an amendment to that motion as follows -

To delete all words after "house" with a view to inserting the following words -

notes the state government's action taken to assist the parties in the Cable Beach camel situation and supports these efforts to ensure this important issue is resolved expeditiously.

I have moved that amendment for two reasons. I think there is broad agreement between the opposition and the government members that we want the Cable Beach situation to be resolved. I believe that members on both sides of the house have tried to be involved in finding a resolution to the situation. The second reason I am moving the amendment is that I think the motion as it stands contains an implicit criticism of the shire. Although the member for Carine has been at pains to say that she is not criticising the shire, she previously criticised the shire, and the motion, by using expressions such as "unfair situation" and "anticompetitive tender process", certainly implicitly, if not explicitly, criticises the shire. That is why I have moved the amendment.

First, I acknowledge the tremendous effort of the tour operators in the Broome and Kimberley regions. I pay tribute to the current camel operators for whom the council's decision has understandably created an enormous amount of concern and angst, because they have been operating on Cable Beach for a number of years. Ships of the Desert started in 1991, Broome Camel Safaris in 1996, and Cable Beach Camel Tours, which started as Red Sun Camels in November 1991, was sold in 2000 and started up again in April 2005. The shire's decision has

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

clearly created a great deal of angst and concern for the operators and the community. I pay tribute to the tourism industry in Broome and the tourism operators. Broome is a significant destination for domestic and international tourists. It is the gateway to the Kimberley, and as such is a critically important town. It is not a small-town tourist destination but is a significant economic contributor. For the benefit of the member for Hillarys, I provide the following information: as at 2004 there were 2 322 accommodation beds, and there are plans for an additional 470 beds. It is pleasing to know that Broome International Airport exceeded its passenger record in July 2006. The chief executive officer of Broome International Airport Group announced that for the month of July total passenger movements at Broome International Airport exceeded 40 000 for the first time. A total of 40 472 passengers were flown in and out of Broome during July, which was three per cent above the previous record set in July last year.

Mr T. Buswell: What has this to do with the amendment?

Ms S.M. McHALE: This is incredible. All the opposition members have spoken about tourism in Broome, but as soon as I put the facts on the table they start interjecting and get hot under the collar. The CEO went on to say -

Our passenger surveys tell us that between 33% and 40% of travellers are arriving in Broome for business reasons, with 45-50% here for pleasure.

It is acknowledged that accommodation has been an issue. The CEO said -

However, as short-stay accommodation, such as the Sanctuary, Frangipani and the new Tropicana Resort comes on stream, we can expect to see new capacity added by the airlines and further growth for the region.

I put that on the record because we need to acknowledge the significant economic contribution that Broome is making as a tourist destination. We should be very proud of Broome's contribution.

Before I address the specifics of the motion, let me also refute the comments of the member for Vasse on how this government sees tourism. Let me remind the member of the Premier's statement when he first became Premier earlier this year. He acknowledged tourism as a key economic driver, and was of the view that tourism is a very significant industry that needs to be supported, and it is supported by this government. By way of example I remind the house, particularly members on the opposition benches, that the tourism portfolio budget for the first time is now \$50 million. When we came to government it was \$30 million.

I move on to the issue of camels in Broome. As Minister for Tourism, I acknowledge the critical importance of tourism to Broome and to the state, and the importance of having a variety of experiences for tourists in Broome. The importance of camel rides to the Broome tourist industry is critical, as is acknowledged by all of us. Camels have played a significant iconic role in national and international marketing. Tourism WA has used images of the camels on its billboards. Camels have played a significant role in marketing Broome and Western Australia nationally and internationally. I share the views of all my parliamentary colleagues. I have expressed my disappointment at the outcome of the tender process conducted by the Shire of Broome. As with any monopoly, there is a real risk that with no competition, which is the anxiety and fear that we are all talking about, the price of this iconic Broome experience could well increase. The capacity for tourist product innovation may well be limited. One consequence could be that customer service could decline. All this would have a detrimental effect on tourism. I do not think any of us are happy - in fact, we are very disappointed - with the decision that the shire made.

The member for Capel asked a number of questions about the licences. I put on record that this issue has its origins in 2005 when Tourism WA expressed concern about the Cable Beach commercial and tourism operation report of September 2005. Stephen Goode prepared that report for the Shire of Broome. Tourism WA wrote to the Shire of Broome in September 2005 identifying a number of concerns with the proposed licensing of Cable Beach tourism activities, not only with the camels on the beach but also with other activities, such as a whole range of proposals to regulate tourism operators' activities on Cable Beach. The report of September 2005 proposed a revisiting of the licensing of tourism activities on Cable Beach. Tourism WA at that time sought the opportunity to be involved in any future tender processes. It is very disappointing that the shire did not take advantage of that suggestion. Had the shire done so, it might well have found it advantageous to have had Tourism WA's input to the tender process.

Dr S.C. Thomas: What were the concerns?

Ms S.M. McHALE: Clearly, an activity involving camels must be regulated. As the member has said, camels are huge. There are safety and environmental issues to consider. The conditions of the licence are a shire requirement. The shire determined that there would be three licences for 16 camels each. Cable Beach is a very

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

popular beach that attracts an enormous number of tourists, not only for camel rides, but also for drives along the beach, walks at sunset and so on. The shire, in my view, was quite correct in ensuring that this activity is regulated. Members on this side of the house certainly do not dispute the fact that there needs to be some form of regulation, and I do not think members opposite dispute that fact either. The member for Capel referred to the significant amount of camel dung that could be produced by 40-plus camels. These are huge animals. The member said that they can be grumpy and dangerous. I think they are inherently risky. There are safety concerns. Standards must be set to ensure the safety of tourists. Members on this side of the house believe that, and I think members opposite do as well.

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: The member for Nedlands does not believe that? We believe that there are safety concerns. We do not accept that this area of tourism should be completely unregulated. However, we have a problem with the end outcome in which one operator has secured three licences. Therein lies the problem. Since the outcome of the tender process, I have instructed Tourism WA to provide assistance and mediation, when possible, to the camel operators and the Shire of Broome and to work with the other government agencies that are involved. Those agencies are, primarily, the Department of Local Government and Regional Development and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure; indeed, I think the Department of Environment and Conservation also has a view on the issue. Tourism WA's director of destination development, Ross MacCulloch, and the Kimberley regional manager, Mr Vaughan Davies, met with the Shire of Broome on 27 July and with some of the existing camel tour operators on 28 July to determine what action they wanted to take and how the government could assist the operators in taking that action. I understand that two of the unsuccessful operators have lodged appeals with the State Administrative Tribunal, and the hearing is scheduled for this Friday, 1 September. Tourism WA has continued to maintain contact and communication with the operators and will assist with the process of the tribunal hearing when required.

There are management issues with the accommodation of camels, and Tourism WA has been liaising with the Shire of Broome on the matter.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development has outlined what the minister has been doing. Essentially, this matter is the responsibility of the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development. I have had discussions with the minister, and my office is working very closely with his office to ensure that an appropriate outcome for Broome's tourism industry is achieved.

Ms S.E. Walker: What are you doing?

Ms S.M. McHALE: Unfortunately, I do not think the member for Nedlands was in the chamber when the parliamentary secretary explained what the minister has been doing, otherwise she would not have asked that silly question. I commend the parliamentary secretary for explaining that the government has looked at probity issues and the appropriateness of the tender process. I certainly commend both the minister and the parliamentary secretary for their commitment to endeavour to bring this matter to a resolution.

I will refer to the comments of members of the opposition that they do not want this motion to be seen as a criticism of the shire. In fact, I think the damage has already been done. The member for Carine wrote to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development expressing concerns about probity and potential conflicts of interest. Indeed, she said that the winner of the tender submitted his application after applications had closed.

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: If that is not a slur on either the applicant or the shire, I do not know what is. She should not come into this place and say that this is not an attack on the council, when she has already made one.

Dr S.C. Thomas interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: It was reported that the opposition's tourism spokesperson said that the local council's decision to award all three camel ride licences on Cable Beach to one operator was highly questionable and unfair. The member for Carine attacked the shire for its lack of probity and said that its decision was unfair and highly questionable.

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: The government is very disappointed in the outcome, but it is not throwing dirt at the Shire of Broome. The shire has set up its tender process and the government has examined the issue.

Ms S.E. Walker interjected.

Ms S.M. McHALE: If the member for Nedlands does not want to listen to the debate, she should not make those accusations. The opposition has said in this place that this is not an attack on the Shire of Broome. Given

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

that the original motion states that it was an anticompetitive tender process and that it was an unfair situation, it is clearly an attack on the Shire of Broome. Those are the words of the member for Carine. She said that the decision was highly questionable and unfair. No wonder the president of the shire, Graeme Campbell, said that the member was taking a cheap shot at the shire. It is disingenuous of the member for Carine to say that it is not an attack on the Shire of Broome when it clearly is. The government does not wish to attack the Shire of Broome. The government wants to ensure that tourists have a high-quality, safe experience so that the many thousands of people who visit Broome can continue to have a wonderful time experiencing Western Australia's wildlife, nature-based tourism and adventure tourism and the camel ride operators are appropriately regulated.

As I said at the beginning of my comments, Broome is the gateway to the Kimberley. There is a lot of activity happening as a result of the increase in the number of beds. The government has worked through the portfolio of local government, as it should; it has inquired into the tender process and, as the parliamentary secretary has already said, it has taken further legal advice. Members opposite should not come into this place and say that this is not an attack on the Shire of Broome, when clearly it is. They should not try to politically grandstand on an issue that we essentially agree on. The original motion and some of the debate has been quite absurd. I commend the amendment to the house.

MS S.E. WALKER (Nedlands) [5.48 pm]: I think I have found a resolution for the minister. She should take up knitting! I will move an amendment that really reflects what this government has done in the tourism portfolio.

Amendment on the Amendment

Ms S.E. WALKER: I move -

To delete the word "action" in the amendment moved by the Minister for Tourism and substitute -
inaction

I have heard the minister speak in the same tone that she has just used and say the same waffly words about children. I remember Coral Bay when I was the shadow Minister for Tourism. The minister is responsible for the state that Coral Bay is in. I remember going there as the shadow minister. They told me that they remembered the Labor Party. They said that Norm Marlborough flew up there and they had arranged a big meeting for him. They said that he was going to do A, B, C, D, E, F and G but he flew off again and they had had not heard from him or seen him for a year.

Point of Order

Mr R.C. KUCERA: There is a rule in this house that members are addressed by their proper titles.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): The member for Yokine is correct. Member for Nedlands, from time to time members get passionate about debate. The appropriate way to address members in the chamber is by the electorate they represent.

Ms S.E. WALKER: I was quoting what the locals in Coral Bay said to me. If the member for Yokine had been awake at the time, he would have heard that. Maybe his eyes were just glazed over like they normally are when we have a debate going on.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I have made my ruling. I ask the member to proceed with the debate.

Debate Resumed

Ms S.E. WALKER: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for your protection.

Ever since I have been a member of this place the government has done nothing for tourism. I have seen it go down the slippery slope. The government cannot even keep up to date with the fantastic things that the coalition government used to do when it was in government. What about the photograph in *The West Australian* the other day that showed the gateway to Perth? I do not think that it has had a touch up ever since this government has been in.

The people of Coral Bay said to me that the member for Peel flew in, said a few words, and then flew off. They did not see him again for a year.

I commend the member for Carine for bringing this motion to the house today.

Mr T. Buswell: If a person wants to go to an empty hall, just hold a morning tea in Kenwick!

Ms S.E. WALKER: I was going to give the minister some advice about that. I hold morning teas all the time in my electorate. At the last one, held a couple of weeks ago, 50 people turned up. On one occasion only one person turned up. Here is the thing. From that one person I was advised of an issue with a school. The minister did not even bother to turn up because there were only three people. She thought that it was a waste of time to

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

see only three of her constituents. That is why she thinks it is a waste of time with the camels. The minister spoke for about 35 or 40 minutes but she told us nothing. She went round and round in circles.

Ms J.A. Radisich interjected.

Ms S.E. WALKER: The member for Swan Hills knows that she goes round and round in circles. That is why I think she should get some knitting needles and do something constructive. She should start knitting or do some crochet. That would be more her forte. Alternatively, she could darn the socks of men from the other side. At least that is constructive.

Ms J.A. Radisich: Shame on you, member!

Ms S.E. WALKER: At least she would be helping someone!

I want to pay tribute to Broome. I recently went up there; it was my third time. I was highly impressed with the Cable Beach Resort. It was in tiptop condition; the service was fantastic. I know that Hawaiian Management Group has taken it over. I was not looking forward to going up there but I have to say that it was fabulous. I thought that the town looked absolutely superb. I commend the local government or whoever it is who is doing something up there. I thank very much the member for Kimberley, who I bumped into. She did me the courtesy of inviting me to a morning tea. I thank her for that. It is important that there is fairness for the camel tourism operators. I am really disheartened to hear from the member for Carine that one of the operators has been going for 25 years. The member for Carine is treating those operators with compassion. The minister never mentioned a thing about that. Did the minister say that she had been in touch or had gone to see the people personally? No.

Mr T. Buswell: She said she was concerned and disappointed.

Ms S.E. WALKER: Just like with the people at Halls Creek.

Mr T. Buswell interjected.

Ms S.E. WALKER: The minister did not even bother to take a camel ride. That is why I moved my motion that condemns this government for its inaction in relation to fixing up the camels.

MS K. HODSON-THOMAS (Carine) [5.56 pm]: I will make some comments about the amendment to the amendment moved by my colleague the member for Nedlands. I have not seen a copy of it but I believe that it wishes to delete the word “action” and substitute the word “inaction”. Quite frankly, after listening to the minister, I think that that is what this is all about - her inaction on this issue. Certainly, she has had a great deal of fun in attacking me about how I have come into this house and debated this issue. I wrote to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development advising him of the concerns that were raised with me by the camel operators. They are allegations that need investigating. I am not coming into this place and making assertions about people in the way that the minister is trying to reflect on me. I came in here hoping that the minister would get her hands dirty for a change instead of sitting back and taking a swipe. If she wants to play dirty, I will get in there as well. I support my colleague the member for Nedlands’ amendment. It reads -

note the state government’s inaction taken to assist the parties in the Cable Beach camel situation and supports these efforts to ensure this important issue is resolved expeditiously.

Ruling by Acting Speaker

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): Order! We have an amendment to the amendment to the motion before the house, which was moved by the member for Nedlands. The amendment requires the word “action” to be replaced with the word “inaction”. Standing order 129 states -

After a question has been proposed by the Speaker, it may be amended, unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, by -

- (a) deleting words;
- (b) deleting words in order to substitute other words; or
- (c) inserting or adding words,

but an amendment may not be a direct negative.

As such, the amendment replaces a word with a direct negative. I therefore advise the house that the amendment to the amendment moved by the member for Nedlands is ruled out of order.

Amendment to Motion Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): The question is that the amendment moved by the Minister for Tourism be agreed to.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 30 August 2006]

p5479b-5495a

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Amendment on the Amendment

Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS: I move as a substitute the following amendment on the minister's amendment -

To insert after the word "government's" in the amendment moved by the Minister for Tourism the following words -

lack of

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Acting Speaker's ruling was that the amendment moved by the member for Nedlands was a direct contradiction of the amendment to the motion moved by the Minister for Tourism. In that circumstance, as I understand it we go back to the amendment to the motion moved by the minister.

Acting Speaker's Ruling

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): Order! With reference to the ruling that I have already given, in my view an amendment to insert the words "lack of" is still a direct negative. I therefore rule the amendment out of order.

Amendment to Motion Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is that the minister's amendment be agreed to.

Ms S.E. WALKER: Mr Acting Speaker, can I seek to amend the minister's amendment?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! No. The member has already spoken.

Ms S.E. WALKER: I have the call.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The member has already spoken to the amendment. The member for Carine.

Amendment on the Amendment

MS K. HODSON-THOMAS (Carine) [6.02 pm]: I move -

That the Minister for Tourism's amendment be amended by inserting after the word "action" the following -

, which leaves much to be desired,

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I have looked at this amendment on the amendment and it is in order. The question is that the words to be inserted be inserted.

Amendment on the amendment put and negatived.

Amendment to Motion Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question now is that the amendment moved by the minister be agreed to.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 30 August 2006]
p5479b-5495a

Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Mick Murray; Acting Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Troy Buswell; Ms Sheila McHale; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Mark McGowan

Ayes (23)

Mr P.W. Andrews
Mr J.J.M. Bowler
Mr A.J. Carpenter
Dr J.M. Edwards
Mrs D.J. Guise
Mrs J. Hughes

Mr R.C. Kucera
Mr F.M. Logan
Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan
Mr J.A. McGinty
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.M. McHale

Mr M.P. Murray
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Ms M.M. Quirk
Ms J.A. Radisich
Mr E.S. Ripper
Mrs M.H. Roberts

Mr T.G. Stephens
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr S.R. Hill (*Teller*)

Noes (17)

Mr C.J. Barnett
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan
Mr M.J. Birney
Mr T.R. Buswell
Mr G.M. Castrilli

Dr E. Constable
Mr J.H.D. Day
Dr K.D. Hames
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas
Mr R.F. Johnson

Mr P.D. Omodei
Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr G. Snook
Dr S.C. Thomas
Ms S.E. Walker

Dr J.M. Woollard
Dr G.G. Jacobs (*Teller*)

Pairs

Mrs C.A. Martin
Mr N.R. Marlborough
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr A.D. McRae
Mr J.N. Hyde
Mr J.R. Quigley
Mr J.C. Kobelke

Mr B.J. Grylls
Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Sprigg
Mr J.E. McGrath
Mr M.W. Trenorden
Mr D.T. Redman
Mr G.A. Woodhams

Amendment thus passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.