



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Backpacking Industry

Hon. M.M. KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (10.22 a.m.): Queensland's latest job-creating tourism team is working to ensure a positive future for the backpacking industry. I have asked the government and the industry team to map out a strategy to ensure that Queensland regains its standing as the destination of choice for backpackers.

Our share of the lucrative backpacker market has weakened in recent years. While more than 270,000 international backpackers still flock to Queensland and the industry is worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year, I am not happy with our reduced slice of the backpacker cake. In June I convened an industry forum to discuss the key issues impacting on Queensland's backpacker market. Industry participants from the Gold Coast to Cairns joined with government agency representatives. The industry knows that the Beattie government is on its side when it comes to the backpacking industry. The forum was warmly welcomed by the industry who said that it was the first time for many years that it had been able to sit down with the decision makers to address industry concerns. The industry gave us an undertaking that it would work with us towards common goals.

A joint industry and government working group met for the first time on 23 July. Four subgroups have been established, each with its own terms of reference. Work plans will be established for each group by mid-September as part of developing a broader plan for the sector by the end of the year. The strategy will help foster the future growth and development of Queensland's important backpacker market.

In the meantime, I have asked Tourism Queensland to refocus on this important tourism sector. Our loss of the backpacker market share can be attributed in part to loss of air access, particularly into and out of Cairns. Other factors include competition from destinations such as South Africa and from within Australia and the rising Australian dollar.

The Beattie government continues to lobby airlines to add Queensland to the network or to boost current service levels. As Tourism Minister, I welcome the 20 per cent boost to international seat capacity between April and October this year, or an extra ten and a half thousand seats. Queensland is the best tourist destination in the world. We want to not only boost the number of backpackers coming here but also improve the experience for them. That is exactly what the Beattie government is focused on doing.