



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Inbound Tourism Industry

Hon. M.M. KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (10.10 a.m.): Rogue inbound tourism operators are firmly in the sights of the Beattie government. The rogues are on notice following a highly successful blitz—Operation Bravo Kong—mounted by my Office of Fair Trading, the Queensland Police Service and federal agencies. This operation focused on gathering intelligence and detecting offences relating to tourism, immigration, liquor licensing and prostitution among Asian businesses on the Gold Coast. Among those targeted were operators of tours, restaurants and nightclubs. Two people were charged with being illegal non-citizens and a number of other offences were detected. While this operation was the first major combined agency blitz, more are planned. We have also teamed up with the Gold Coast inbound industry to target the crooks. I can announce that several investigations are already under way with a view to possible prosecutions.

Without a national approach, we will never be able to clean out rogue operators from the multibillion-dollar inbound tourism industry. I have urged my federal, state and territory ministerial colleagues to help Queensland preserve Australia's reputation as a high-quality and safe destination. Rogue operators are a problem not only in Queensland but also across Australia and New Zealand, and we really need to work together if we are to take effective action. Fair Trading has already forged a productive partnership with the Australian Tourism Export Council as part of the offensive against the rogues.

Queensland is represented on a national compliance task force. The task force comprises the police, fair trading and tourism agencies, the ACCC, the Federal Police, the Australian Taxation Office, Customs and a range of Commonwealth departments. The task force has a broad-ranging charter, including gathering information on priority areas for prosecution, keeping a watching brief on inbound operators in emerging markets, and undertaking a study on the extent of the cash economy within the tourism and hospitality industry. In addition, we will be approaching universities on the Gold Coast and seeking their cooperation in liaising with their Asian students to prevent the opportunity for extortion and exploitation of students.

Tourism is Queensland's second largest export industry. We must protect our reputation at all costs. Queensland is the only Australian jurisdiction to have specific legislation targeting inbound rogues. Our Tourism Services Act gives Fair Trading the power to seek injunctions, restrict registrations, issue fines and seek orders directing the refund of money and prosecute those who do not comply with the legislation. The Queensland Police Service and other agencies, both state and Commonwealth, are working with Fair Trading to gather evidence to prosecute those breaking the law. I really do thank the Minister for Police for her cooperation in this matter. Well done, Minister for Police. I want to assure both international visitors and the tourism industry that the Beattie government is serious about chasing the crooks out of our second largest export industry.