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Question : Royal Agricultural Society Conference

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Member : Mr DUNHAM

To : MINISTER for TOURISM

Status : Questions

Information :

The Royal North Australian Show Society recently hosted the 18th biennial conference of the Royal Agricultural Society in Darwin. Among those to attend was the Duke of Edinburgh. I understand it was a very successful conference. How successful was the event?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I welcome this question. The Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth - the British Commonwealth of Nations, not the Commonwealth of Australia - held its 18th biennial conference in the Top End. The conference was won in the West Indies by Lyn Jones, the former CEO of the Royal North Australian Show Society, together with George Cridland, the then president. They were successful in their negotiations. The conference brought delegates to Darwin and Katherine from places as diverse as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, the West Indies, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England itself. There were delegates from royal show societies throughout the Commonwealth.

The excellent turnout for this international conference underscores the fact that the Territory has become a real destination for conferences and meetings. This is very important in the context of our tourism industry. To be able to attract high-profile individuals such as Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and also the Duke of Westminster, the chairman of this conference, together with Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, certainly adds to the profile the Northern Territory enjoys on the international stage. I congratulate Mr Percy Ellis, the president of the Royal North Australian Show Society, and Mrs Cherry Court, the CEO of the society, and the executive members on pulling off this remarkable coup. It was reported widely around the world. That is good for the Territory and good for tourism. Many of the 200-plus delegates stayed on to undertake other activities. The farms visit to Katherine was very beneficial for those who participated.

I had not had the opportunity previously to meet Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. I must say that the publicity that precedes some of the Royal Family often does them a gross disservice. I am sure those members of this Assembly who had the opportunity to talk with him found him to be a very approachable and amenable individual, as were the Duke of Westminster and the Secretary-General.

The trip got off to a somewhat awkward start. I guess it underscores the fact that the Leader of the Opposition simply does not know what she is doing. She came to the fore with her usual incompetence. She wrote to His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh:

Sir,

I understand that you will be visiting Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia between 23 and 25 April 1998. I understand that, during your visit, you will be meeting

members of the Country Liberal Party administration. I believe it would be beneficial if you could also spare the time to meet me and members of the Labor Party opposition. Please contact Holly Butler in my office.

This is absolutely extraordinary stuff. The Leader of the Opposition also misspelt his name. As someone who came from England originally, I would expect at least that she would know how his name is spelt. Her defence was: 'Your Protocol and Public Affairs Branch director told us to do this'. That officer disclaims any knowledge whatsoever of the Leader of the Opposition's office ever contacting the branch. In fact, I have written to the Leader of the Opposition because it is of concern to me that someone should give out such misinformation. I have invited the Leader of the Opposition to tell us who in the Protocol and Public Affairs Branch gave her that advice. Needless to say, no reply has been forthcoming. She made it up. She made a fool of herself, and she held Territorians up to ridicule.

Mrs HICKEY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! The Chief Minister says that he sent me a letter and that he has not had a reply. I would like him to send me a copy of that. I have had no letter from him on this subject, apart from the first impertinent letter that he sent me some time ago.

Madam SPEAKER: I am not sure what your point of order is. Perhaps you could follow that up later.