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THE SENATE

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Grace Kelly: Style Icon Exhibition, Tourism

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker McKenzie, Sen Bridget

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Senator McKENZIE (Victoria) (21:55): I rise tonight to speak about regional tourism, specifically about a fantastic exhibition that has been conducted at the Bendigo Art Gallery. During the last three months we have witnessed one of Australia's most successful tourism events, the *Grace Kelly: Style Icon* exhibition at the Bendigo Art Gallery. This exhibition ran from 11 March until 17 June, for 91 days in total. The exhibition explored the development and cultivation of Grace Kelly's style, influence and almost fairytale transformation from Hollywood actress to princess. It included films from the era and an array of the clothes, accessories and photographs of one of the most photographed women of the 20th century. I congratulate the Director of Bendigo Art Gallery, Karen Quinlan, and all those who worked hard to secure this outstanding exhibition from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Grimaldi Forum Monaco.

I applaud Karen Quinlan's foresight in bringing this exhibition to regional Victoria, to the iconic Bendigo Art Gallery. It followed on from the success of two previous exhibitions at the gallery: the *The White Wedding Dress: 200 years of wedding fashions* exhibition and the *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957* exhibition. Bendigo is getting quite the reputation for this type of exhibition, for using the unique space within the Bendigo Art Gallery to display this type of work. Opening the exhibition was quite exciting for Bendigo. The Princess of Monaco—Princess Charlene, Prince Albert's wife—was there for the opening, along with an array of dignitaries from the local area and right across Australia. The Premier of Victoria, Ted Baillieu, opened the exhibition. He acknowledged to the crowd:

Securing this exhibition, which will showcase the style and panache of Grace Kelly to Australian audiences, is a great result and another example of Bendigo Art Gallery punching well above its weight.

I would have to agree. The Victorian government supported the exhibition with a \$160,000 grant and, as a result, this will be the last major temporary exhibition before a much anticipated \$7.55 million redevelopment of Bendigo Art Gallery, with building works expected to commence this year. Karen Quinlan said:

We are thrilled to be able to introduce an Australian audience to this unrivalled wardrobe, and chart Grace Kelly's unique influence on twentieth century fashion.

Obviously that began with the white wedding dress exhibition. I was speaking to Senator Heffernan today and mentioned that I was speaking on this topic in the adjournment debate, and he told me that his wife had recently headed down south over the border from New South Wales to Victoria, to the great regional city of Bendigo, specifically to catch a glimpse of this significant exhibition. It has been a massive economic boost for Bendigo, as one would imagine. It has lifted Bendigo's profile across the country and has given us credibility nationally. It is a cultural investment that will be long term. The *Grace Kelly: Style Icon* exhibition was even more successful than the 2009 exhibition *The Golden Age of Couture*, another significant fashion showcase entrusted to the gallery, which lured more than 75,000 visitors to Bendigo and resulted in a \$9.2 million boost to the local economy. The Grace Kelly exhibition saw, in those 98 days, 156,000 visitors to the Bendigo Art Gallery, it being booked out for days on end. For the weekends before it finished they had to open late, and it was booked out. People were driving up from Melbourne thinking that they could just grab a ticket and get in; however, it was very disappointing for a lot of them when they could not. It resulted in a \$17 million boost to the Bendigo economy. This is double the record of previous exhibitions.

The most recent figures from Tourism Victoria list the number of 'visitor nights' to the Bendigo region per year at about 2.6 million and the number of day trips to Bendigo at 2.9 million, which add around \$661 million per year to the local economy. Overnight and day trip expenditure from visiting Australians has been calculated by Tourism Victoria at \$1.8 million per day into the region—and that is just domestic visitors. On average they stay two nights and spend about \$120 per person per day.

Bendigo businesses have seen an immediate impact. The Bendigo Art Gallery literally brought 500 to 700 people to the city in a weekend. The mums and dads often brought their kids and the grandparents. It is a significant economic injection.

There are lots of good reasons to encourage tourism in regional Australia and to continue to fund projects which assist regional communities to build their cultural capacity in the arts sector. It cannot be underestimated. Local tourism offerings highlight the value of natural attractions and generate economic activity, jobs—employment growth—and export revenues. Again according to Tourism Victoria, last financial year tourism directly contributed \$7 billion to the our local economy and it was 2.4 per cent of the gross state product. The employment statistics in Victoria are also growing at an average annual rate of 3.1 per cent as a result of tourism; that is 17,000 people each year. Tourism's share of employment in Victoria is now at seven per cent. In regional areas, the value of tourism is estimated at 3.4 per cent of the regional economy.

It is critical, particularly after much of regional Victoria has been affected by drought, fire or floods, that a focus on tourism is ongoing, coordinated and well supported. Whilst we would like to focus on the diversification of our local economies, that is to take nothing away from the underpinning of what drives our economies in regional Victoria, that being agriculture and its associated value-adding industries.

Traditionally, though Bendigo has been known as Australia's premier goldfields heritage region, with the legacy of the gold rush still evident in the history and heritage of the area, the added success of the Bendigo Art Gallery clearly demonstrates the improving tourism experience and increased consumer demand for regional tourism—and an increased need for and availability of skilled workers in this area.

Developing cultural assets is crucial to ensuring the liveability of regional Victoria. Cultural asset funding improves the attractiveness and lifestyle benefits of regional Victoria and enhances the aesthetic and cultural vibrancy of our local communities.

Sadly, though, Bendigo is an anomaly in terms of national tourism figures, as they are falling rather than increasing. Last year, Australians spent 132 million nights abroad, pumping billions of dollars into overseas economies. A decade ago Australia made a \$3 billion profit nationally from tourism, and today we are making a trade loss of around \$8 billion. Inbound tourism traditionally accounts for around a quarter of the sector's turnover, whereas activity by Australians holidaying at home is far more important for the national accounts and for the survival of local tourism business in our regional centres.

Tourism operators are crying out for customers as the high dollar further reduces our share of international tourism and encourages Australians to holiday abroad.

The bottom line is that, unless we start holidaying at home in greater numbers, the great example of tourism celebrated this week by the Bendigo Art Gallery will be lost, and we will see expected tourism losses of \$8.7 billion this financial year, 2012-13, and beyond.

But, finally, I would really like to offer my congratulations to Victoria's tourism operators for being recognised at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards this year. The winners were the Melbourne Museum and the Bendigo Visitor Centre. I also congratulate the Bendigo Art Gallery on finalising what has been a fantastic example of their networking internationally to be able to bring an exhibition that has been celebrated right across the world into Bendigo. Opening night was quite a classic as the red carpet rolled down the historic streets in Bendigo, the cameras flashed and the limos of the important people rolled up. It was noted that this particular exhibition had gone to London and had been shown in Monaco, and now it was in Bendigo—in regional Victoria—which has been fantastic.