

Events calendar needs attention and more cash

New Tourism Minister Kim Hames is right when he says WA is lagging other States in hosting big-ticket events and needs to lift its game. That has been obvious for some time as several big sporting events have fallen by the wayside. The absence of the Australian leg of the World Rally Championship, the V8 supercars, Johnnie Walker Classic golf and Red Bull Air Race has left a gaping hole in the WA calendar and hit tourism operators hard.

It is encouraging that Dr Hames has acknowledged the problem, something his predecessor Liz Constable seemed unwilling to do, but his test will be in securing more money to bid for and stage national and international events.

The reality is that if WA wants to host major events, either one-off or regular competitions or festivals, they will not fall into its lap. The Government, through the Eventscorp agency, needs to actively seek opportunities and bid for them.

It's not an easy process and there is plenty of competition in the events market from other States with more money to spend.

It will take a deliberate commitment by the Government to devote more attention and resources. Its events budget has fallen in recent years to about \$12 million a year and pales when compared with the \$130 million Victoria spends. As Deputy Premier, Dr Hames should wield some clout in improving that situation.

Australian Hotels Association WA chief Bradley Woods proposes a budget of \$50 million as a starting point, a suggestion that should be taken seriously.

All West Australians stand to win if more tourists arrive with their wallets open.

Big-ticket events also allow locals to enjoy some of the drawcards of the sporting or cultural worlds and gain a social dividend from the good economic times.

We are hungry for that opportunity as big and enthusiastic crowds at the Hopman Cup tennis and the Peggy Guggenheim show at the Art Gallery of WA have demonstrated.

Housing choice needed

Housing Perth's growing population has for years meant more big homes on big blocks. Builders have been happy to provide the so-called McMansions and aspirational buyers have been quick to snap them up. Of course, it has not been only the option for buyers but the four-bedroom, two-bathroom model dominates new suburbs.

But worsening affordability and a declining land supply have forced a change of thinking and it appears builders and developers are realising that not everyone needs, or wants, the standard option.

As Planning Department chief Eric Lumsden points out today, the housing market needs choice and more emphasis on making better use of the land available.

The building industry will respond to market demand so it is up to potential buyers to make it clear what they want. Change may be slow to come but a wider variety of housing options, in particular denser development in inner areas and close to transport, will help produce more vibrant, lively communities.