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# Call for jetty to cater for cruise ships

By LAUREN VARDY

A JETTY with the ability to berth cruise ships would provide significant opportunities for the town, says Tourism Esperance treasurer and cruise ship co-ordinator Milton Valli.

Mr Valli said the biggest challenge facing the local cruise ship industry in the future was providing a facility for the ships.

"We need infrastructure if we are going to be a major player in this industry," he said.

Mr Valli said the 2013-14 season went by without too many problems.

"The thing that determines whether a cruise ship returns is passenger feedback and comments on what the town is like. All season we were lucky with the weather, it could have been worse."

Currently, a \$5 charge is in place to move cruise passengers from Taylor Street to the Esperance Visitor Centre.

"This charge is financially supported by the Shire of Esperance to control the cost," he said.

"If cruise ships were to come in at James Street, that cost would not be needed. A lot could be done with the infrastructure in that area to make it easier to transport them around town."

This year, all cruise liners opted to make use of the pontoon, rather than berthing at Esperance Ports Sea and Land.

The 2014-15 season starts in October with a visit by cruise liner Volendam on October 19, whose capacity stretches to just over 1400. At least seven cruise ships intend to come to town next season.

Mr Valli has recently been

appointed to the Cruise Western Australia committee, where he will continue his push for cruise ships in Esperance. Last week he was appointed deputy chairman of Australia's Golden Outback.

"I'm passionate about the ongoing push for the development of tourism in Esperance," he said.

"I'll be working to 'push open doors' to try to promote and develop Esperance"

Mr Valli said that on average, each ship to visit Esperance contributed about \$150,000 to the local economy.

Moving forward, Mr Valli said the biggest challenge facing the local cruise ship industry would be providing the facility for the ships. "We need infrastructure if we are going to be a major player in this industry," he said.

A plan to boost tourism throughout Margaret River was unveiled in June last year, detailing a strategy for millions to be spent on infrastructure in a push to attract more tourists.

About \$200,000 in cruise ship facilities are planned for the Augusta Boat Harbour, including signs, seating, landscaping and pathways to cater for cruise ships, recreational and whale watching boats. The harbour is due to open this year, with facilities to be in place by June, subject to funding.

Mr Valli said Tourism Esperance would like to see a jetty put in place in town to moor cruise ships alongside.

"If you put something like that in place, some 85 per cent of people will choose to get off the boat," he said. "Without it, the day will come when no one will come into town because of the swell and the winds."

Mr Valli said Tourism Esperance's second preference would be to tender passengers to James Street, bringing them to the heart of town.

He said making a good variety of tours available to passengers to keep them engaged and to attract cruise ships into the future was imperative.

Radiance of the Seas visited Esperance on March 1, bringing about 2300 passengers.

Mr Valli said about 300 people took up the tours on offer to places such as Observatory and Twilight Beach, the national park, to Stonehenge and to local galleries.

Red Lion manager Ken Gratton-Wilson said the company ran about five different tours, all of which were well received, especially the tour to Wharton Beach and to Condingup.

"Looking to the future, Red Lion would like to be able to handle people more efficiently at Taylor Street," he said. "From our perspective it would be good to have a better turning facility."

The company had to pick passengers up from the front of the Esperance Bay Yacht Club and run a special bus to cater for those passengers who could not walk the distance.

Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Grant Shipp said the chamber had received great feedback from both businesses and cruise ship passengers during the 2013-14 season.

"We continue to encourage all businesses to take advantage of the economic boost cruise ships provide to town," he said.

"We look forward to another successful cruise ship season next year."

## Holden the apple of his eye



**Shining success:** Esperance local Garry Drew took out the People's Choice award at the Outta the Shed Car and Bike Show last Sunday with his red Holden FJ. Mr Drew has now won the award twice in a row. Full story and photos, page 10 and 11.

Photo: Lauren Vardy



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