

Wine-led tourism cure



WORLD-CLASS: Wirra Wirra managing director Andrew Kay says cellar doors have become the cornerstone of the total wine tourism experience. Picture: TAIT SCHMAAL

MATT SMITH

INTERNATIONAL tourists are shunning South Australia and spending less, new figures show, just a day after the industry accused the State Government of short-changing the sector.

New visitor numbers show international visitors to SA have dropped by 4 per cent to 457,000 in the 12 months to March 2018 as the numbers nationally grew by 3 per cent to 8.5 million.

The visitors are also spending less with expenditure dropping by 7 per cent –

to \$1.1 billion – compared to a 5 per cent rise nationally.

Tourism and Transport Forum chief executive Margy Osmond described the figures as incredibly worrying for the state and blamed the cut on the lack on investment into tourism promotion.

Federal Tourism Minister Simon Birmingham will today address the issue as he officially opens Australia's first-ever conference dedicated to wine tourism.

Senator Birmingham will argue competition for attracting global visitors is

stronger than ever and success will demand reasons to visit that are as compelling as possible.

"Being good isn't good enough," Senator Birmingham says in a draft speech provided to *The Advertiser*.

"We must have excellence in every aspect of the experience, we must have clear points of difference and we must be attracting attention."

SA was not the only state or territory to see a decline in international visitors, but the figures represented the worst performance in the country.

WA saw a drop in both visitors, 1 per cent, and expenditure, 2 per cent, while Tasmania saw a 12 per cent drop in expenditure without a drop in numbers.

Senator Birmingham will urge governments at all levels must help facilitate development.

"To leverage the demand for amazing wine tourism and luxury dining experiences international travellers want unique venues and exquisite accommodation," Senator Birmingham says.

"I urge states to work with local authorities to identify

the locations where quality development can sustainably occur and where such developments efficient approval processes."

He will say the Federal Government "stands ready to help find the investors to get developments off the ground, to help navigate any federal approvals and to make sure such experiences are marketed to the world".

He will today officially open the National Wine Tourism Conference "Beyond the Barrel".

It is aimed at Australian wine businesses looking to

enhance their wine tourism offering and increase the number and expenditure of international tourists.

Managing Director of McLaren Vale winery Wirra Wirra, Andrew Kay, said he has witnessed first-hand the transition from cellar doors as simply "tasting rooms" to be the cornerstone of the total wine tourism experience. "We've invested in our facilities, systems and people to create world-class experiences that meet the demands of the tourism sector and we continue to learn and evolve," Mr Kay said.