

EASY ENTRY OPTION

Internet visa push aims to boost Chinese tourism

■ Kent Acott

Chinese travellers should be able to apply online for tourist visas as part of initiatives to make it easier for them to take holidays in Australia, advocates say.

WA shadow multicultural interests minister John Hyde said the current system was often expensive and time-consuming and needed to be streamlined.

An online service available to people in other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, would make it easier for Chinese peo-

ple to visit Australia. "Many neighbouring Asian countries benefit greatly from tourism due to the ease of visitor entry and easier entry doesn't have to compromise security," Mr Hyde said. "WA's tourism businesses need all the support they can get."

New Tourism Council of WA chief executive Evan Hall agreed and said more should be done to remove barriers for overseas tourists.

"In many countries, it can be difficult to get a tourism visa," Mr Hall said. "It might involve having to go to another city to

visit an Australian embassy.

"And it could involve a payment of around \$80 — but why do we charge people to holiday in our country?"

Mr Hall criticised this week's Federal Budget and the failure of the Commonwealth to invest in tourism. "For the fifth year running, the Federal Government has frozen funding levels to promote international tourism," he said.

"This is a real cut in government funding at a time when local operators are struggling.

"WA tourism is set for long-term growth if we can really

crack the China market. The China Southern Air direct flight agreement this week with the WA Government is a major step forward, but the Federal Government must come to the party."

A spokesman for Immigration and Citizenship Minister Chris Bowen said the Government was keen to see more Chinese visitors. He said tourist visas were processed in China within five working days on average, an exceptional service that helped some 246,290 Chinese visitors reach Australia in 2009-10.