



15 April 2008

Airport sale will give Cairns world-class hospital

The State Government will expand Cairns Hospital and buy a new hospital site to secure the future of world-class health services in Cairns, Premier Anna Bligh told State Parliament this morning.

"Airport sales in Cairns, Mackay and the sale of the Government's stake in Brisbane Airport will fund major hospital upgrades in Mackay, Cairns and Mt Isa," said the Premier.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson said the Bligh Government is delivering funding that will provide significantly expanded health services for the Cairns community that will mean a higher standard of health care for residents much sooner.

"The Cairns Hospital will be expanded and a new clinical wing will be delivered.

"It will be the new hub for more surgical and day beds, additional cardiac care facilities and a day surgery unit.

"The new building will also deliver enhanced aged care and rehabilitation facilities and radiation oncology services.

"In addition, a new comprehensive cancer care unit will be delivered in consultation with COUCH," he said

Member for Cairns Desley Boyle and Mulgrave MP Warren Pitt said the sale announcement meant North Queensland residents could look forward to the new hospital within the next five years.

"As it is, the Cairns Base Hospital does a terrific job but there is always room for improvement," Ms Boyle said.

"Predictions are that demand at Cairns Base Hospital will double by the year 2021."

"In addition, the main section of the hospital (B Block) will be completely refurbished to provide a new home for specialist clinics and pathology services," Ms Boyle said.

"To provide for future expansion, B Block will contain 4 vacant floors which can be activated as required as the community grows beyond 2021.

"The new funding will also deliver an integrated mental health unit that will provide additional beds for patients needing longer term care.

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"This will see an expansion of the current mental health unit into the existing A Block on the southern side of the Hospital.

"Now that funding has been secured we will fast track the acquisition of a large parcel of land on the southside of Cairns that will provide for future health services needs, like a dedicated health precinct or perhaps a hospital.

"The community will be invited to have their say about the future services to be offered on the southside."

Mr Pitt said the airport sales was the only way to meet demand and build the new infrastructure.

"The plan to rebuild and refurbish Cairns Base Hospital could have faced considerable delays had the decision to sell the airports not been made.

"This is the best – and the quickest – way forward," he said

The Cairns Hospital carpark will also be relocated.

Member for Barron River Steven Wettenhall and Cook MP Jason O'Brien said preliminary plans would involve constructing a new block at Cairns Base Hospital, possibly on the site of the current car park.

That would mean relocating the car park to a site across the road from the hospital.

Mr Robertson said the State Government and the Cairns and Hinterland Health Service District would continue to work closely with the community to ensure we get the mix of services right for the long term.

"I'd like to thank Desley [Boyle] and Warren [Pitt] the other Far North MPs who are great local champions who continue to argue strongly for improved health care services," he said.

"The \$11 million Emergency Department expansion at the base of C block will continue to be delivered.

"I've made it very clear that community consultation must continue in relation to the Clinical Services Plan which will inform the Master Plan that will guide the redevelopment of the Cairns Hospital," he said.

Cairns airport is the largest remaining Government-owned airport in Australia. It is Australia's sixth largest domestic and fifth largest international airport.

Ms Bligh said that the sale of the Cairns and Mackay airports is not expected to have any negative impact on passenger or tourist numbers.

"In fact, there is potential for the new ownership arrangements at the airports to result in greater investment in the airport and associated facilities," she said.

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