



# 'Sayonara' to north riles tourism chiefs

**Peter Michael**

JAPANESE are being urged to say "sayonara" to Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef.

In a double whammy for the ailing tourism industry, in-bound Japanese tour operators have launched their own cheeky campaign ahead of flight cuts.

One Japanese travel agency website blares: "Sayonara: Farewell Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef — This is your last chance to see."

Tourism chiefs said the Sayonara sales pitch seemed to suggest that far north Queensland was about to be "wiped off the map" as a viable travel destination.

It comes as Tourism Queensland's latest publicity stunt — which involved scantily clad bikini models flashing commuters on the streets of Sydney and Melbourne — continued to draw a mixed response yesterday.

But while Cairns faces losses of \$120 million a year and 1200 job cuts, the next three months are shaping to be

among the best yet for the inbound tourist trade.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland's Rob Giason said forward bookings were "very strong" up to September.

"It is not as if Cairns ceases to exist after December (when Qantas axes inbound flights)," he said.

"We have still got seats coming to us out of Japan, albeit half the capacity of before, and we will be packaging Sydney/Gold Coast/Brisbane combinations."

He said he was a little disappointed with the Sayonara sales pitch.

"I'm not overly pleased that sort of reference is out there because we are still open for business," Mr Giason said. "But innovative wholesalers use all sorts of ways to grab an audience and that might motivate them to come and visit."

He said it was much the same as the bikini models on the streets down south.

"If people are talking about it, that's a good thing," he said.

Queensland Tourism Minister Desley Boyle flies to China and South Korea as early as next week hoping to convince airlines to set up routes to Queensland destinations.

Australian carriers Qantas and Jetstar in a shock announcement last Thursday said they were cutting money-losing routes between Australia and Japan.

Ms Boyle takes a kitty of at least \$8 million to offer as incentives after the Federal Government matched Queensland's \$4 million emergency support package for the tourism industry.

She has refused to reveal how much would be tabled to get an airline to fill the void left by Qantas.

But a bus company is stepping in to at least capitalise on domestic transfers. Greyhound Australia has announced it will start daily coach services from Mackay Airport to the Whitsundays to help fill the gap caused by air service cutbacks.