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IN A STATE OF ALERT

FNQ holiday bookings cancelled after new COVID travel rules

THE Far North’s tourism industry is struggling to deal with the fallout of a three-day lockdown in Brisbane as a surge of booking cancellations hits the region.



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— council areas of Brisbane, Logan, Ipswich, Moreton and Redlands, but that does not mean that Far Northerners are off the hook. Any residents or tourists who have visited Brisbane since January 2 are required to isolate until 6pm Monday after a quarantine hotel worker in the state's capital tested positive to the mutant coronavirus strain. Barron River MP Craig Crawford also urged anyone who had been in contact with someone who had been to Brisbane since January 2 to isolate. "There's definitely a risk that (the carrier) could have had contact with someone who had contact with someone that may be walking around Cairns right now," he said. "It could be here already. "A lot of people travel between Cairns and Brisbane,

owner Alan Wallish had a boatload of tourists out on a reef trip when news broke of the lockdown. The business had finally returned to being temporarily busy with interstate borders open, but cancellat-

nerable people living in aged care or with a disability. Mr Wallish said it could not come soon enough. "The biggest thing now is a vaccine," he said. "Our industry is a hostage to planes and planes won't fly

"It's been a really good three weeks – if the borders are open, it works," he said. "Next week is in limbo now and then we were going into a very quiet period anyway. "Let's just hope there's

Uncertainty over the extent of an ultra-infectious UK strain of COVID-19's spread in the southeast, the possible extension of the lockdown past Monday and whether the potential outbreak has already made it to Cairns has fragile tour operators even more nervous.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive Mark Olsen knows all too well that uncertainty is a killer for the industry which has been hit financially hard by COVID impacts. TOURISM operators are scrambling to deal with the fallout of a three-day lockdown in Brisbane as a surge of booking cancellations hits the Far North.

Uncertainty abounds over the extent of an ultra-infectious UK strain of COVID-19's spread in the southeast, if lockdown will be extended past Monday, and whether the potential outbreak has already made it to Cairns.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief executive Mark Olsen knows all too well that uncertainty is a killer for the industry.

"There's no doubt that Brisbane has been a huge market for the region over the summer, so this will have a dramatic impact on the region," he said.

"We are already hearing from operators of significant cancellations from Brisbane.

"That is all about certainty or uncertainty but we understand that we have to get on top of this – that's the most important thing to do now."

Lockdown has been announced for Greater Brisbane, which includes the council areas of Brisbane, Logan, Ipswich, Moreton and Redlands, but that does not mean that Far Northerners are off the hook.

Any residents or tourists who have visited Brisbane since January 2 are required to isolate until 6pm Monday after a quarantine hotel worker in the state's capital tested positive to the mutant coronavirus strain.

Barron River MP Craig Crawford also urged anyone who had been in contact with someone who had been to Brisbane since January 2 to isolate.

"There's definitely a risk that (the carrier) could have had contact with someone who had contact with someone that may be walking around Cairns right now," he said.

"It could be here already. A lot of people travel between Cairns and Brisbane, so if there is a secondary location for it we could be one of the frontrunners.

"It might mean cancelling the weekend's events and Monday as well, talking to your boss about not going to work or working from home on Monday."

Passions of Paradise owner Alan Wallish had a boatload of tourists out on a reef trip when news broke of the lockdown.

The business had finally returned to being temporarily busy with interstate borders open, but cancellations were already being phoned in on Friday afternoon.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has announced a vaccine rollout could begin in mid-to-late February for people working in quarantine, frontline health, aged care and disability, and vulnerable people living in aged care or with a disability. Mr Wallish said it could not come soon enough.

"The biggest thing now is a vaccine," he said.

"Our industry is a hostage to planes and planes won't fly if they don't have people on them.

"The problem now is the lack of confidence.

"People are questioning if they fly, are they going to be locked down."

He hoped three days would be sufficient to knock the UK strain on its head.

"It's been a really good three weeks – if the borders are open, it works," he said.

"Next week is in limbo now and then we were going into a very quiet period anyway.

"Let's just hope there's good news on Monday."

Cairns MP Michael Healy urged all Queenslanders to take the threat seriously even if they were outside the lockdown zone.

His own family is dealing with the serious impact of COVID-19 after his 28-year-old niece contracted the virus while living in the US.

She has never smoked and is otherwise fit and healthy but is now struggling to breathe and feels like someone is "constantly sitting on her chest".

"She's having very serious health and respiratory issues, so we know how serious this is," Mr Healy said.

"In Texas, they've been told not to bother trying to go to the hospital because the hospitals are all swamped," he said.

It was a situation the assistant tourism minister did not want to see replicated in Queensland. "The measures we've taken are precautionary and what happens over the coming days will determine what we do over the coming weeks," he said.

"If this is exposed to anybody it will have huge detrimental impacts across a wide range of areas for our community.

"That's why we've taken the strong and stringent measures that we have.



"Let's deal with facts, not speculate and get on top of this."

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