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# CATHAY'S FLY BYE

## City's last-ditch effort fails to salvage airline's 26-year service

LAST-DITCH efforts to stop Cathay Pacific abandoning Cairns have failed – with a demand for millions of dollars believed to be the deal-breaker.



The Cairns Post understands the Hong Kongbased airline asked for State Government subsidies of up to \$70,000 per flight for negotiations to progress.

But the breakdown in talks was revealed late yesterday when Cairns Airport confirmed the organisation's representatives, as well as those from Tourism Australia, Tourism and Events Queensland, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch, Cairns Mayor Bob Manning and Cairns MP Michael Healy, could not convince the airline to stay.

Cairns Airport chief executive Norris Carter said the airport would "continue to work with (Cathay) as future opportunities emerged and hoped to welcome them back to Cairns in the future". The airline will cut flights between Cairns and Hong Kong in October after 26 years. Advance Cairns chief executive Nick Trompf said not being able to convince the carrier to continue operations was disappointing but he believed it was a commercial decision and not a failure on the part of local stakeholders.

"Airlines move their inventory around all the time and it's very disappointing to lose Cathay after 25 years, but there is nothing to be gained by blaming. If there was a failing, sure, they need to be looked at, but Cathay has not come out and said they feel unsupported or relations have broken down," he said.

Mr Carter said there was a silver lining in the rebranding of SilkAir as Singapore Airlines and its increase to daily flights beginning next month.

"SilkAir's increased capacity will provide more options for international visitors to the tropical north," he said.

Shawn McAtamney, of ISP Seafoods, used Cathay Pacific to transport live lobster and coral trout to China. He said his business would be affected by the carrier's decision to end Cairns flights.

"It's a real loss for our industry on that side ... and on the other side, our company is one of the key distributors of seafood in Cairns to end users in hotels," he said.

"We now have to look at alternative routes ... For us it is about waiting and seeing if another carrier reacts to the (demand) that's there or look at longer flight routes."

Cr Manning said he had seen carriers come and go.

"Aviation is a dynamic area; losing airlines is never easy. However ... the airlines can move their assets around and if they can do better somewhere else, they will," he said.

"That's the nature of the beast. It's not the end of the world. You have got to pick yourself up, dust yourself off and get on with the job."

Cathay Pacific last night told the Cairns Post a "changed commercial landscape" was the reason for cutting flights.

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