

Flight plan opens up

CHRIS CALCINO
chris.calcino@news.com.au

Unity plea as city looks to fill Cathay void

CATHAY Pacific's withdrawal opens an opportunity for a bigger and better international airline to fly into Cairns – but it comes with a warning that disunity is death.

The *Cairns Post* yesterday revealed the Cathay goose was cooked unless taxpayers coughed up an unreasonable \$70,000-a-flight ransom.

Cairns Chamber of Commerce president Nick Loukas said turning down the offer was a no-brainer.

"What they were asking for was just not worth it," he said.

"Cathay Pacific is not the be-all and end-all.

"There are active discussions with other large airlines that could potentially fill the void."

The region has time up its sleeve with Cathay not pulling out of its Cairns-Hong Kong route until October 27.

It is understood that Cairns Airport has been talking with many operators, including

Emirates, even before Cathay announced its exit.

Mr Loukas said it was crucial local, state and federal governments co-operated to get a deal in place.

"Now is the time all the organisations should be working together and putting out a common message, because disunity is death," he said.

Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch, who had been publicly very optimistic about convincing Cathay to overturn its sus-

pension, explained how the deal went south.

"Norris Carter (Cairns Airport chief) met with Cathay executives in China and we said tell us what you want," he said.

"The airport said they were willing to offer concessions in relation to landing fees, the state government said we are prepared to put money into this if that's the issue.

"Cathay came back and said, righto, give us \$70,000 in the peak period and we will

stay for two months.

"That is not a long-term solution and so we just said no.

"We need to be looking at something further than just a two month Band-Aid solution and we said no, we are not going to just throw money at this unless you guys are prepared to commit."

@editorial@cairnspost.com.au

facebook.com/TheCairnsPost

www.cairnspost.com.au

twitter.com/TheCairnsPost

DOOR KEPT OPEN

CATHAY is still talking like its suspension is temporary.

"We will continue to operate passenger services to Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide, and explore other opportunities moving forward," a company spokesman said.

"The operation and commercial landscape has changed, but we will keep a close eye on the opportunity of resuming services to Cairns on our own aircraft."