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Article rank | 15 Mar 2021 | The Cairns Post | ARUN SINGH MANN

Competition to take flight: airport boss

TOP-TIER airline competition is set to return to the Far North, says Cairns Airport chief executive Richard Barker, as he welcomes Qantas's promising announcements for the region.



Cairns Airport CEO Richard Barker, Yolande Entsch,

Picture: Romy Photography

Cairns Airport CEO Richard Barker, Yolande Entsch, Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch, Qantas CEO Alan Joyce and TTNQ CEO Mark Olsen at the Advance Cairns 20th anniversary dinner on Friday.

The major carrier's chief executive, Alan Joyce, last week announced at least 21 new services a week from Sydney and Melbourne into Cairns, while declaring the region a "major market", as well expressing his interest in a Japan Airlines-Qantas partnership.

Mr Barker said Mr Joyce's visit to the Far North was a "positive endorsement" for the region, which he said rival airlines would take note of.

"He's not just (adding services) to be a nice guy, he's doing that because he knows there's demand. Because there is," Mr Barker said. "He wants to maintain its dominance in the market but we are pretty confident that Virgin will respond and add capacity, which then adds pressure on keeping prices competitive, which is good for the region."

Mr Barker agreed with Mr Joyce's comments that now was not the time for an international terminal facelift.

"So it's really important, given how uncertain we are around internationals, that we have competitive prices for airlines, or they'll go elsewhere and they are our biggest customers. A common criticism from airlines is that airports over-invest in infrastructure when the demand just isn't there," he said.

Mr Barker said Australia could not afford to wait until it or other countries were COVID-free to resume international travel, because holiday-makers in the US and Europe were already planning their next winter trips.

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