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Article rank | 18 Mar 2021 | The Cairns Post | PETER CARRUTHERS

BLUE SKY THINKING

QANTAS is planning to return to the Cairns-Japan route next year with a three-times-a-week service to Tokyo.

The airline has applied for approval in a joint venture with Japan Airlines to operate an A330.

Qantas says it will play a critical role in rebuilding the Far Northern tourism economy when international borders re-open.

It comes as Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk announces a top-level panel involving aviation and tourism leaders to plot a post-COVID recovery course for leisure and holiday-maker markets. THE race is on to have the \$17m refurbishment of Cairns Convention Centre complete ahead of its first conference – the Australian Banana Industry Congress from May 12 to 14.

Cairns MP Michael Healy, who hosted Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk and Tourism Minister Stirling Hinchliffe in the Far North on Wednesday, said the convention centre had generated around \$80m of economic activity annually for Cairns.

“With this expansion and ongoing development of this infrastructure, we will see around \$130m pumped into our community with the MICE – meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions – market,” Mr Healy said. “Once that comes back, Cairns is going to be so well positioned to capitalise on it, and there are already some conferences lined up.”

Works include a large undercover forecourt, a larger main entry, a 410-seat lecture space, three 120-seat meeting rooms as well as a 500-seat rooftop banquet space with views over Trinity Inlet.

Mr Hinchliffe said the refreshed centre would be an appealing international convention option when global borders reopened but in the meantime, it would attract national events.

There are 544 workers on the job at the centre.

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