

## **Mareeba Airport Redevelopment**

The Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) welcomed in late 2010 a commitment from the State Government for a \$13 million upgrade of the Mareeba Airport. The funding would see the Airport become Queensland's second major aviation service centre after Cairns and was an important investment in the future of Far North Queensland. The redevelopment of the airport has the capacity to bring benefits to the whole region - both in the construction phase and once the works were completed. The project has the potential to be a job incubator for whole region with the hope that local companies will tender for works associated with the construction and be cost competitive in that process. Once the redevelopment has been completed, there will be jobs created in aviation-related activities.

The \$13.3 million upgrade was set to position Mareeba Airport as a training hub for the Asia-Pacific region, providing world-class facilities and attracting a larger share of the \$322 million local aviation sector. However, the State Government has decided to withdraw the funding. Retention of funding is being pursued by TRC, Tablelands Futures Corporation (TFC) and other regional stakeholders as this is a key pillar in the Mareeba Airport Development Plan which aims to attract more business by developing the facility as a high technology maintenance and specialist flight training centre. Mareeba is perfectly placed to leverage off a world-wide aviation industry skills shortage by providing vital training services to the Asia Pacific region.

The \$13.3 million upgrade will enable the Airport to capitalise on the high demand for aviation training as well as attract significant industry investment to Mareeba, boosting the economy and creating local jobs and will also transform an Airport that began as a refuelling and rearmament base for Australian and American bombers in World War II into a first-rate training and aviation service centre (Tablelands Regional Council 2010 <http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news>).

A staged plan and timeline for construction has been formally adopted by Tablelands Regional Council. The first step is to deliver a useful and useable airstrip for up to 45,000 kg aircraft and all the necessary facilities for the development of an aviation industrial estate. TRC has opted to strengthen the existing runway, main taxiway and apron to accept aircraft up to 45,000kg in weight which will allow for the landing of heavy aircraft such as the Dash 8-100, the C130 Hercules and some jet aircraft under certain conditions (Tablelands Regional Council 2012 <http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news>).

A report tabled at a TRC meeting outlined potential business opportunities that would flow from the redevelopment such as:

- Heavy maintenance of up to Code 3C aircraft, predominately Dash 8-100 aircraft
- Spray painting for up to BAe146-300 aircraft
- Helicopter maintenance and flying training
- There is interest from an International Flying School to set up at Mareeba which conservatively would generate 20 well paid permanent jobs, but much more indirectly
- General Aviation maintenance, workshops and storage hangers
- Aviation support facilities and services e.g. avionics and aircraft sales
- Freight consolidation and distribution
- Additional refuelling facilities; and
- Other aviation related activities.

Stage 1 of the redevelopment involves:

- Undertaking stormwater drainage works
- Strengthening the sub-grade of the existing runway and re-sheet with sprayed bitumen seal
- Construction of additional taxiways on the western, southern and northern sides of the runway
- Construction of the helicopter apron
- Construction of the Aviation Industrial Precinct, utilities, taxiways, aprons, fuel facilities, and access road at the western end of the airport
- Construction of an engine run-up bay at the western end of the airport including a hydrant style water outlet for agricultural aerial spraying and fire-bombing operations; and
- Construction of a portion of the flight training school apron sufficient to accommodate up to 20 aircraft (Tablelands Regional Council 2012 <http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news>).

The upgrade at the Mareeba Airport was the only State Government project, as at March 2012, that created enabling infrastructure in Far North Queensland. That is, it will create economic activity, rather than just be catch up infrastructure. There are operators at Cairns Airport that could move to Mareeba creating space for higher value businesses in Cairns whilst creating expanded opportunities in Mareeba. The Aviation and Marine sectors are the only two local sectors in Far North Queensland that are expanding and creating new jobs.

**References:**

<http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news/13-million-upgrade-mareeba-airport>

<http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news/full-steam-ahead-mareeba-airport-re>