

## **Virgin Blue to touch down in Hervey Bay in 2005**

25 August 2004 - Hervey Bay City Council today announced that Virgin Blue will fly into its newly upgraded airport with direct jet flights from Sydney due to touch down for the 2005 whale watching season.

The deal will see flights from Australia's largest metropolis directly into the emerging tourism mecca, delivering significant long-term growth for the local economy and a huge pay off for the local tourism market.

The City Council is spending \$11 million to upgrade the existing runway and terminal to allow jet aircraft to land and positioning it as one of the east coast's leading gateways.

Mayor Ted Sorensen said the route, which is still hotly contested by the major carriers, will not only enhance Hervey Bay's reputation as a major tourism destination on the national and international stage, but will also provide residents with access to cheaper airfares and national airlines.

"We are absolutely delighted that Virgin Blue will fly into our city and provide a high quality, low fare service between the two cities," he said. "Hervey Bay has long been known as the whale watching capital of the world and the gateway to Fraser Island and the southern Great Barrier Reef, and this service will open that market up enormously.

"Fraser Coast residents and business people will also benefit by access to cheaper airfares and national airlines, with direct flights giving family and friends the opportunity to reunite on a more regular basis. I'm sure other carriers will follow suit to take advantage of this fantastic opportunity – the region will no doubt flourish as more people discover its potential."

Virgin Blue will fly its 737-700 aircraft into the city carrying up to 144 passengers on each flight. Virgin Blue chief executive officer Brett Godfrey says the airline's decision to provide direct flights into Hervey Bay is a natural extension of its market, as the region awakens to a new era of growth.

"The Fraser Coast is an exciting tourist destination and is home to some of the world's natural wonders, with more and more people discovering them each year," he said. "We expect the majority of flyers to be travelling for pleasure to enjoy the delights of Fraser Island or to visit family and friends, but Wide Bay business travellers are also set to reap the benefits. Virgin Blue is continuing its well established tradition of 'hub-busting', by offering people direct services to where they want to go, instead of being forced to change aircraft on the way."

While the Sydney-Hervey Bay flights are likely to cater to a wide cross-section of people, it is the package holiday market that is likely to generate the most traffic.

Mayor Ted Sorensen says the city's established and up-and-coming infrastructure, such as the \$80 million Peppers Pier Resort on the Urangan beachfront, will help accommodate the influx of new visitors and a burgeoning convention market.

"There's no doubt that interest in Hervey Bay is on the up, with an 18% jump in visitor nights during the past year, together with a 3.4% increase in visitor numbers," he says. This, coupled with the area's affordability and new accessibility, will drive a fresh cycle of economic, population and property growth."

The airport runway extension program to allow larger 737-700 jet aircraft to land has already commenced, with the announcement of Woodhead International as the architects for the \$4 million terminal extension and survey works on the \$6.7 million upgrade of the existing airstrip underway.

Mayor Sorensen says funding has been allocated in the Council's 10-year financial plan to pay for the infrastructure program and requires no external borrowings for the \$8 million planned spending this financial year.

"It's time for Hervey Bay to take its place as a major player in the Queensland tourism and convention market, and enabling larger aircraft to land here will help facilitate this," he said.