



**MEDIA RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

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**Extra Virgin flights add 54,000 new seats**

Strong advocacy by Whitsunday Regional Council's Mayor and CEO has produced a positive result with Virgin Australia today announcing three extra flights a week.

Mayor Andrew Willcox and CEO Barry Omundson recently joined with Whitsunday Coast Airport general manager Brian Joiner to initiate rounds of talks with all airlines to boost passenger seat numbers for the airport.

Virgin has added extra WCA-Brisbane return flights on Monday, Thursday and Friday utilising their B737-800 aircraft.

Mayor Willcox said the extra flights announced by Virgin would add over 54,000 seats annually and bring more than \$30 million in increased economic spend into the region. "Whitsunday Coast airport continues to be one of the fastest growing regional airports in Australia with a new annual passenger number record" he said.

The airport hit a new high of 470,945 passengers for the 2017/18 financial year, more than 116,5000 than the previous year. This was the seventh consecutive year of positive growth in passenger numbers at Whitsunday Coast Airport.

"We are catering for further growth with a recent runway upgrade and terminal expansion ensuring visitors to our region enjoy a positive experience when transiting," Mayor Willcox said. "These record numbers are even more impressive when you consider the challenging period our community endured in the wake of the impacts of Cyclone Debbie."

Mayor Willcox praised the team at WCA for their outstanding efforts which included a lot of collaborative work done in partnership with all stakeholders. "I am grateful for the support and confidence Virgin has shown in the ability of our region to continue to grow. Our airport team is also exploring options with airlines for commencement of a Whitsundays- Cairns direct flight to link with international services," he said.

Tourism Whitsunday General Manager Natassia Wheeler said the record passenger numbers were great news for their stakeholders and a positive sign that the region is continuing its growth as a premium tourism destination. "Everyone at Whitsunday Regional Council, and especially the airport team, should be congratulated on this fantastic result," she said.

"The fact that a record number of people have passed through Whitsunday Coast Airport in the last financial year is a clear demonstration that what we are doing as an industry is working. It is also a positive sign for our tourism operators and other related stakeholders that their resilience during recent challenging times is paying dividends," Ms Wheeler said.

Russell Shaw, Virgin Australia General Manager of Network, Revenue & Alliances said, “Our additional flights between Brisbane and Proserpine will give local and overseas visitors even more reasons to travel to the Whitsundays and see the beauty and magic of the region for themselves.”

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